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The Sex Without Sentiment

Books by
THYRA SAMTER WINSLOW

PICTURE FRAMES

BLUEBERRY PIE

PEOPLE ROUND THE CORNER

SHOW BUSINESS

MY OWN MY NATIVE LAND

WINDOW PANES

THINK YOURSELF THIN

THE WINSLOW WEIGHT WATCHER

THE SEX WITHOUT SENTIMENT

The Sex Without Sentiment

*Short Stories written with Understanding
but without Sentiment*

by

Thyra Samter Winslow



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FOR KATHRYN BOURNE

The best fiction editor in America
in my opinion, undoubtedly biased
because on three publications she
published over half of these stories.

Thanks are due to the editors of *Cosmopolitan*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Journal of Living*, *The American Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Today's Woman* and *Woman's Day*, for their permission to reprint these stories.

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A LAMB CHOP FOR THE LITTLE DOG

IN A THOUSAND YEARS it never would have occurred to Mrs. Taylor to get a dog. Why, a dog is almost as much a nuisance as a child and can't grow up and support you when you grow old. Mrs. Taylor had never even had a pet while Mr. Taylor was alive.

Mrs. Taylor lived in a one-room apartment in a huge brick building, though, as she always pointed out, it really wasn't one room. There was a nice little living room with two big windows. A bathroom with lovely orchid tiles opened off a tiny foyer. And how many one-room apartments have foyers at all? There was a dressing room, too, and a kitchenette, complete even to electric refrigerator.

In the living room was the tapestry three-piece set which had been in the big apartment before Mr. Taylor died, several tables, one opening out so you could eat on it, and two straight chairs. And Mrs. Taylor's pride—a blue and gold Chinese rug with deep cutouts. The walls were ivory, the curtains blue and gold silk. A disappearing bed was concealed, daytimes, behind doors.

Mrs. Taylor thought the apartment was very nice. It was easy to keep clean, too, and she liked everything in apple-pie order.

She really couldn't afford the apartment. Mr. Taylor

had left life insurance and had saved besides, but these didn't give Mrs. Taylor a great deal. Economists would have been horrified to learn that rent took half of her income. But she wanted to "live nicely" and a woman alone doesn't need a great deal. She didn't eat much and she bought so few things to wear. She hated to think of living in a messy place. This neat little nest was her only luxury—all she had.

Mrs. Taylor woke up at seven, just as she had done when her husband was alive. She got the newspaper from the door, glanced at the headlines. She made the bed, then pushed it up out of the way. No one ever came in, mornings, but you never can tell. She prepared breakfast. Toast and coffee and marmalade. Mr. Taylor had liked bacon and eggs. She cleaned up, dusting vigorously. Then she read her newspaper again. Thoroughly. Slowly. News and feature columns.

Sometimes she telephoned an acquaintance, making a date for shopping or bridge.

The morning over, she had a lunch of canned soup or a bit of left-over.

All this time she had kept on her nightgown, her cotton negligee over it. Around one o'clock she dressed.

She played bridge, then, or shopped rather futilely, sending most of the things C.O.D. and not accepting them. Or she spent the afternoon reading or doing her nails or puttering, going out at four to do her bit of shopping.

Dinner, then. A small piece of meat and a frozen or occasionally a fresh vegetable, especially when lima beans or corn were not too expensive. Or a meal in a neighborhood restaurant. Soup. A breaded meat with gummy gravy. A canned vegetable. Cole slaw. An inexpensive pudding.

A movie perhaps once a week. Or buying a new magazine and back in negligee again, reading in the chair that stood under the bridge lamp. Sometimes for days she didn't

speak to anyone, except over the telephone or casually to the grocer's clerk. She never had been a great one to make friends.

When Mr. Taylor was alive they had gone with some of his business acquaintances and their wives, together with a few stray women Mrs. Taylor knew. Since Mr. Taylor's death the couples had rather disappeared. An odd woman doesn't quite fit in when she hasn't money for entertaining. Mrs. Taylor telephoned these women occasionally, and she played bridge or went shopping with one of the strays, mostly widows like herself.

Once a year she was invited to luncheon in Larchmont with Mrs. Burrows, a second cousin, who was very rich. She spent most of the visit being shown the place and listening to what an exciting life the Burrowses led. She talked about the visit long after it was over.

It was Mrs. Green, wife of Rufus Green, one of Mr. Taylor's friends, who telephoned Mrs. Taylor about the dog.

"Since we've planned to live in England," Mrs. Green said, "I haven't had a minute to call you. But I feel that of all our friends I'd rather have you have Frisky. I can't take her into England without six months' quarantine and she'd never live through that. You know how sensitive she is!"

"Take Frisky! Why—" Mrs. Taylor's voice was high, uneven.

"I'm giving her to you!" Mrs. Green was soothing, sweet. "I said to Rufus I'd be satisfied if you had Frisky. You haven't any children to annoy her and you wouldn't go away week ends and leave her with servants."

"But I—" began Mrs. Taylor again.

"I know how surprised you are," Mrs. Green went on. "I wouldn't dream of giving Frisky away if we weren't going abroad. I'll miss her dreadfully. She sleeps on my

bed and drinks right out of my glass. She understands everything I say. You know how smart she is."

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Taylor. She thought she knew.

"I'll bring her over on Tuesday," said Mrs. Green. "We're sailing on Thursday."

Mrs. Taylor didn't know what to say. Her little one-room apartment was so perfect. She didn't need a dog. A dozen times she started to telephone Mrs. Green. Yet when Tuesday came and Mrs. Green did not arrive, she was actually a little disappointed.

On Thursday morning Mrs. Green came with Frisky.

"I just couldn't bear to part with her a minute sooner," she said. "I knew you'd understand. I've written down everything. Hamburger if she'll eat it, though she prefers a lamb chop. A green vegetable, though you'll have to beg her to take it or cut it up fine in her meat. A bone to chew on. And no potatoes or chicken bones. But I guess you knew that."

Mrs. Taylor didn't know. She didn't know anything about dogs.

Mrs. Green kissed Frisky on her little brown nose.

"I hate to leave her," she said. "But I know she'll have a good home. She's so sweet. Minds everything I say. She really seems almost human. Take her out the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night. And once during the day. She's perfectly housebroken. She'll probably cry for a night or two, but after that she'll be just fine."

She addressed the dog. "Oo'll be ust fine wizzout oo Muzzy, won't oo? Werry dood for new Muzzy? Doo by, Muzzy's darlin'!" And Mrs. Green was gone.

Mrs. Taylor and Frisky looked at each other. Mrs. Taylor sat down. Frisky continued to stand. They didn't seem to get very far that way.

Frisky was a Pomeranian. A brown Pom. If you had

judged Frisky impartially at the bench, you'd have had to admit that she was not a cobby bitch. Her hair was too short, too, but she was pert and saucy and she held her tail well. Her thin, lively little legs, a bit ostrich-like, gave her a piquant appearance.

"Here, Frisky!" Mrs. Taylor called, timidly.

Frisky ran to the door and whimpered. Did that mean Frisky wanted to go out? Or did she want to follow Mrs. Green?

"Come here, Frisky," she repeated more firmly. Frisky whimpered. Evidently Mrs. Green was the only one she understood and obeyed with her almost human intelligence.

"Frisky!" said Mrs. Taylor sternly. Frisky gave two whimpers and a bark. A high, tremulous bark. Well, she wanted something. There was no use taking chances.

Frisky wanted many things. She begged to go out far more often than Mrs. Green had predicted. And she was not entirely housebroken. Or she had a poor memory. Her forgetfulness did not help Mrs. Taylor's blue and gold Chinese rug.

Mrs. Taylor's peaceful days were over. In the morning, instead of keeping on her nightgown, she had to dress and take Frisky down in the elevator and, outside of the apartment building, had to pretend she didn't see Frisky at all and yet keep a good watch over her so she didn't run in the street and get killed. During the first weeks she sometimes thought that would be a good way out.

Back in the apartment Frisky needed attention. Her coat had to be brushed. And she had a way of rolling in the dirt, which meant she needed bathing far oftener than if she had kept herself erect on her four spindle legs. She grabbed at bedroom slippers, chewed the corners of the rug, always wanted to be played with.

During the first week she whined every night. And

barked too much during the day. After that she was quiet enough, though she did have a way of jumping on the bed just when Mrs. Taylor was falling asleep. And she yowled if she were locked in the kitchenette or bath.

Her dinner had to be carefully prepared. She turned up her little brown nose at all of the canned dog foods. Mrs. Taylor knew if she let Frisky go hungry she'd eat canned food. But she was so little. That did seem unnecessarily cruel. So Mrs. Taylor bought her a little lamb chop nearly every night. And she had always felt she couldn't afford lamb chops for herself! She would broil the chop, cut it into tiny pieces and mix it with a little fresh vegetable—and what a bother it was always to have a green vegetable. Frisky ate every bit of her meal and then played with the lamb chop bone.

Even a humorous letter, written to Frisky by Mrs. dressed so she could take Frisky out. Some nights she put her coat on over her nightgown, but she felt terribly undressed that way. A dog was an awful nuisance.

Even a humorous letter written to Frisky by Mrs. Green, didn't make her feel any better. Mrs. Green had got out of it. And what did she mean writing to Frisky? She wasn't Mrs. Green's dog.

In curious ways Mrs. Taylor's life changed. Not only because she had to be dressed early and late and had to buy an extra lamb chop.

Making new acquaintances, for one thing. Until Frisky's advent Mrs. Taylor never dreamed of speaking to strangers. Now, with a friendly, perky, little dog, it was hard to avoid advances. Most of them were made in good faith, she found out.

"May I pet your little dog?" "Does your little dog bite?" and, "What kind of a dog is that?" were the commonest beginnings. Just a curt "Yes" or "No, she doesn't," or

"Pomeranian" sufficed. Or you could be a little warmer and hear about the dog the stranger had or used to have. These encounters were without significance.

The important encounters were with people who had dogs. Until now Mrs. Taylor had been, in a way, unaware of anyone else with a dog. She had seen dogs on the street, had never paid any attention to them.

Now she was absurdly conscious of dogs. Each person with a dog became, in some mysterious fashion, an intimate friend. Mrs. Taylor found herself discussing dogs. Whether it was easier to have a small or a large dog in an apartment, with the owner, male, of a police dog. She talked with apparent deep feeling about muzzles to the owner, female, of a darling wire-haired. She admired the antics of a Scotch terrier and compared the charms of his short legs to Frisky's comparatively long ones.

A whole world opened to Mrs. Taylor—a camaraderie the existence of which she had never known. She learned about baths, societies, and shows for dogs. She was a little chagrined because she had not asked Mrs. Green about a pedigree. It would be like Mrs. Green to get a dog with no background! She was sure Frisky had never won honors in the ring.

She joined, night and morning, the dog owners of her neighborhood. They all knew each other. She wasn't just Mrs. Taylor, living alone in a one-room apartment, but the owner of Frisky, part of a group, someone of importance. There was always something gay to be said.

In the shops it was different, too: more than routine. Clerks petted Frisky's little brown head. The grocer would say, "How's the little dog today? A lively little fellow."

The vegetable man would smile sympathetically over the order of "Twenty-five cents worth of green beans," give extra measure—and tell about his own dog, a white

poodle. Smartest dog you ever saw. He'd sit for five minutes on his hind legs without moving a muscle.

Trafficking with the butcher formerly had been without character. Mrs. Taylor had never understood how women got so friendly with tradespeople. She had ordered, as part of her unexciting day, a small steak, a bit of ground meat. Seriously. With no superfluous conversation.

This was all changed, now. She gave her order with a smile. Her own portion of meat first. Then the butcher would say teasingly, "I guess you've forgotten all about your little Frisky."

And she'd laugh and say of course she had *not* forgotten her. Add, almost coyly, "And a nice lamb chop for the little dog."

In restaurants it was different, too. If a restaurant didn't like dogs, Mrs. Taylor, her head high, would flounce out, Frisky under her arm, feeling insulted but important. In other restaurants Frisky was made much of. A chair was pushed up to the table for her. She'd sit there, her bright eyes surveying the scene. Waiter, customers, even the manager, sometimes, would come to the table.

"What a good little dog!" they'd say. "A person can get so attached to a dog!" Eating in a restaurant was almost a ceremony.

Things weren't so nice when Mrs. Taylor went to see her second cousin in Larchmont. The Burrowses had dogs of their own. Mrs. Taylor had seen the great, hulking creatures, had never liked them. She brought Frisky because she always took her everywhere, except to the movies; wouldn't have thought of leaving her alone all day.

Mrs. Taylor was invited to luncheon, but she always thought that meant spending the day. She made the trip holding Frisky on her lap and was awfully afraid the little creature would get train-sick on her best dress. Frisky

acted very well in the train and in the car which met them at the station.

Mrs. Taylor was a little hurt when Mrs. Burrows failed to be enthusiastic over Frisky. She always was too patronizing. Nothing but her own things ever were first rate! Who was she, anyhow? Why, she wasn't used to dogs nearly as good as this little Pom!

Frisky didn't behave very well. She forgot the most important of her manners. Mrs. Burrows said that *her* dogs, prize winners, stayed in the kennels where dogs belonged. Mrs. Taylor said that *her* dog went everywhere she did and tried to convey that she usually visited homes quite superior to the Burrows'.

Before this, Mrs. Taylor had always spent the time at her rich cousin's admiring the furniture, the just-purchased antiques. Now she was aloof, superior. She knew when she left, Frisky tight in her arm, she wouldn't be invited again. Well, she'd never had a good time.

After that, Mrs. Taylor found herself liking Frisky for herself. Not the deep emotion of a real dog lover, perhaps, but something far more than mere indifference. Sometimes she'd seize the little, brown, furry bundle and hug it fiercely. After all, with Mr. Taylor dead, there was no one else she really cared about. She felt that the little dog understood, cared for her, too.

But there were many more times when she was annoyed with Frisky. The spots on the Chinese rug that the chairs wouldn't cover. Being waked up by a little dog who "wanted out," though she'd been out two hours before. The run in her best stockings because small, insistent paws had begged for attention. But, as she laughingly told Mr. Smythe, the distinguished owner of the Scottie, who went for his outings when Frisky did, "You don't mind putting up with a lot of things when you've got a dog."

Some of Mrs. Taylor's acquaintances didn't care for Frisky. Well, she felt she could save a lot of dimes by not telephoning them. There were enough people in the world, luckily, who were real dog lovers.

Frisky became ill. At first Mrs. Taylor tried to think it was nothing at all. She gave her castor oil capsules, following the advice of the owner of the French poodle. Frisky continued lethargic. None of the other advice, given in turn by the owners of the red chow, the beagle, and the cocker spaniel, had any effect. Frisky belied her name. Her little brown nose was warm. She hung her head and her tail.

Mrs. Taylor took her to the hospital in a taxicab. She knew she couldn't afford the taxi nor the hospital. Oh, well, she really didn't need a new hat. And while Frisky was away she wouldn't need the extra lamb chop, could live mostly on canned soup.

Frisky didn't get better. Mrs. Taylor went to the hospital every day. She told all of her acquaintances who owned dogs about Frisky, though, when she didn't have to go out early in the morning or late at night, it was hard to keep in touch with them. They were most sympathetic, understood how she felt. They told about dogs they had had who had been ill.

Frisky died. Mrs. Taylor paid the hospital bill and wept many tears. She was surprised at herself. She wouldn't have believed it possible that she—or anyone else—could have grown to care so deeply for a funny little dog.

Maybe it was for the best, she told herself. Maybe she never was a person who should have had a dog. Well, she'd been good to the little thing. Now she could settle down, be herself again.

She cleaned the one-room apartment from corner to corner. She polished the floor until you could see your

reflection. She brushed the furniture until it looked almost like new. The brown hairs which once had annoyed her so much were all gone. The last hidden chop bone was discovered. No longer would she fear to step on a rubber ball in the dark. Everything was in order. Frisky was dead. It was too bad. But that was that.

But unfortunately, that wasn't that. Life seemingly had gone back to the way it was before Frisky had disrupted things, but actually nothing was the same. Mrs. Taylor would wake up and get the newspaper. She'd dawdle over her breakfast. And tell herself how grand it was she didn't have to dress early. Yet she was unreasonably restless. Unhappy. All around her she seemed to see an eager little brown face, a darting pink tongue. She seemed always to be hearing a sharp, insistent little bark. How silly!

It was even worse when she went out of doors. Suddenly Mrs. Taylor found that no one paid any attention to her!

Before she had Frisky it never occurred to Mrs. Taylor that she was practically invisible. She had worn dark, decent clothes and thought that people treated her very well. Now she saw, curiously enough, that no one noticed her. She went out on the street—and it was just as if she were not there!

The morning and evening groups of dog owners had been properly sympathetic over Frisky's passing. Mrs. Taylor had made a point of telling in detail about Frisky's end. She couldn't keep that up. And without a dog she was no longer one of them.

She telephoned to her old friends the way she had done before she had Frisky. But even the telephoning had lost its savor. She took long walks and no one spoke to her. Before she had Frisky, had she walked wraithlike, unseen?

To the clerks in the shops she became again a colorless, routine customer. They waited on her mechanically. She

didn't exactly want to attract attention. But she did want to feel alive.

She didn't know what to do with her time. She had always known what to do before. Now she woke up in the morning, hurriedly started to dress. Then she remembered. There was no reason to dress at all. All day she was discontented, lonely. Waiting for something to happen, even while she told herself that nothing ever would.

She began looking into pet shop windows. Of course, the puppies looked cute. They always looked cute in shop windows. What of it? She wasn't going to buy a dog. It would be silly, spending money for a dog. Anyhow, she couldn't afford it. It would mean going without a winter coat. All summer and fall she had been planning on a new coat.

Well, no one ever looked at her, the way things were, anyhow. And there was a little man on Sixth Avenue who could reline her old coat for practically nothing.

She didn't want an ordinary little dog, she said, when she went into the pet shops. She didn't know about buying from kennels. She wanted a nice little Pomeranian. She had had a little Pomeranian who had died. She wiped her eyes.

Oh, no, she wanted a much better Pom that *that!* A *very* small dog! With a good pedigree. Champion stock. Something she could show. Yes, a male was nice. Still, a female was nice, too. And so affectionate!

She found one, finally. A three-months-old smoke-colored Pomeranian bitch. They said she would turn orange with her second coat. Pointed to her pedigree. Champions on both sides. The only reason she was for sale was because she was too small for breeding. As a pet she was a great bargain.

Mrs. Taylor thought about the puppy for two days, went in to see her half a dozen times.

"You'd better make up your mind," the man in the shop said. "A puppy like that will be grabbed up and you'll feel bad."

She hesitated. And made up her mind after the shop was closed. She worried all night. What if someone else—She couldn't stand it. She was at the shop at nine the next morning.

Feeling that she was doing the wrong thing, but feeling, too, that a whole web of circumstances forced her, she went home with the puppy in a little splint basket.

She had a name all ready. *Pretty Lady of Fairholme*. Fairholme was the kennels from which the puppy had come, and the dealer had told her the pup could be registered that way. She'd call her Lady.

As soon as she got back to her apartment Mrs. Taylor took Lady out of the basket. Lady sat on the floor, a soft, frightened little bundle.

Then, suddenly, she began to show signs of life. She jumped around. Immediately Mrs. Taylor found out that Lady would be much more of a nuisance than Frisky ever had been.

She bit everything. Curtains. Stockings. Slippers. She paid no attention when you spoke to her. She was not housebroken, even though the man in the dog shop had said she was "trained to paper." Her training consisted in biting the paper to bits and then yipping in joy at the completion of her task.

She pulled back on tiny, quivering legs when Mrs. Taylor put a leash on her. She gobbled up her milk with great enthusiasm.

Mrs. Taylor looked at her new pet. For that mussy bit of gray fur she had spent the money for a new coat. Had

destroyed the perfection of her immaculate apartment. Had made it necessary to be dressed early and late. Had deprived herself of going places where dogs were not allowed, unless her visits were to be short and full of anxiety. Her friends alienated. Her home disheveled. Her money spent!

She picked up the puppy, held it against her face. The puppy squirmed, didn't even give the little licks that Frisky, in affectionate moments, had bestowed.

What had she done? She couldn't take the puppy back. There was nothing she could do, now.

She put on her hat and the old coat that would have to do for another year. She put the absurd leash around the tiny gray throat, took Lady down for her first regular visit out of doors.

The elevator man, who hadn't noticed the splint basket when Mrs. Taylor came in, suddenly came to life. He had been a wax figure devotee only to running an elevator since Frisky had died.

"My! My!" he said. "Ain't that sure enough a nice little puppy! Little, ain't he? Is it the same kind as the other one? Will it grow just the same—coat and all?"

Mrs. Taylor answered all his questions eagerly.

Almost in front of the building was Mr. Smythe. What a coincidence. He hadn't gone to the office. A slight cold. But he was better, now.

How he did exclaim over the little puppy! The two of them, tears in their eyes, roared over the antics of Pepper, Mr. Smythe's Scottie, as he tried to get acquainted with Lady. Yes, they were going to be great friends. Yes, a little bitch. Mrs. Taylor had learned to use the word "bitch" without straining over it. Yes, she expected to show her as soon as she was old enough. Ought to make a champion. Yes, she was going to be home in the evening.

Why yes, if Mr. Smythe wanted to come up and play with the puppy—

Only a block down the street she met the girl with the wire-haired and the old lady who had the poodle. They both went into ecstasies over the little dog. Only three months old! How well she walked for her age. "She" was right, wasn't it? How well she carried her tail! Good blood! Yes, dogs aren't like people. You can be sure of their ancestry. Yes, if you're the kind of person who loves a dog there's no use trying to get along without one. There's something about a person who is a dog lover, they all agreed—

In the grocery store there was great admiration for the new puppy. The vegetable man contributed, free, a handful of green beans and a carrot. "Carrots are good for puppies and babies," he said.

Mrs. Taylor's eyes were moist. This was living! Being noticed—and talked to! Friendly with people. A part of things.

What if she did have to wear her old coat another year? It didn't matter at all. Everything was all right again.

She hugged the squirming bit of gray fur closer. She called the butcher's attention to her new acquisition. He leaned across the counter, patted the tiny gray head.

"A very cute little fellow!" he approved.

Mrs. Taylor gave her order. Half a pound of hamburger. She smiled, ever so coquettishly, now, sure of her power.

"And don't forget," she said. "A very nice lamb chop for the little dog."

MORE LIKE SISTERS

YOU TWO CERTAINLY look more like sisters than mother and daughter," people always told them. Each person who said it acted as if the remark were original, and as if both Mrs. Robbins and Lela would be delighted. Mrs. Robbins did like it. She always preened prettily and adjusted her collar or one of her blond curls. Under the bright sunshine you noticed that Mrs. Robbin's youth was, in a way, synthetic, but at all other times she was favored by the comparison with her daughter.

At twenty-six Lela was too thin. Her mother was only slender, and even if her slenderness was produced by diet and baths and massage, still her figure was nicely rounded—the kind that men liked—and her will-fitted clothes seemed always a little tight. Lela, on the other hand, wore her clothes too loose and she had angles. Mrs. Robbins was three inches shorter than Lela, and though Lela was of moderate height, Mrs. Robbins was so nicely proportioned that she seemed just about right and her daughter too tall.

They were both blondes, but the natural tint and texture of Lela's hair seemed drab by comparison with the golden softness which artifice gave to Mrs. Robbins's. They both went to the best beauty parlors, but Lela's hair was a trifle on the stringy side and never quite kept its wave. Mrs. Robbins's hair was always perfectly coiffured—a mass of rather foolish, becoming little curls and waves. Mrs.

Robbins's skin was better than Lela's, and her cheeks were smooth and plump. Her blue-gray eyes were a trifle darker than her daughter's and she used more mascara, so they seemed larger, too.

Not that Lela wasn't a nice-looking girl. It was just that you always saw her with her mother, and Mrs. Robbins pranced along seeming jollier than Lela, somehow, and more fun.

They had lived abroad for years. Lela had gone to school in Switzerland, and then they'd lived in France and in Italy until Europe became difficult and Mrs. Robbins decided they'd be happier at home. They went to Florida now in the season and indefinitely North in summer, choosing various spots that seemed interesting to Mrs. Robbins from hearsay. They took cruises that Mrs. Robbins read or heard about. In spring and fall they were in New York, with a small suite in some hotel that was smart but not quite tops. And around them in New York were any number of men, most of them Mrs. Robbins's acquaintances. Neither Mrs. Robbins nor Lela knew many women.

"You can't trust women," Mrs. Robbins would tell Lela. "They seem to be your friends, but what do they ever do for you? Nothing. If it hadn't been for that Mrs. Blanding from Detroit, I'd never have had a quarrel with Rudie Simmons. He'd have forgot all about it by the next day."

Sometimes Mrs. Robbins surprised herself by getting up early and going shopping or to the dentist, but as a rule she slept all morning and had breakfast in bed—toast and fruit and coffee without sugar or cream. No matter what she'd been doing the night before, she never had a headache in the morning.

Lela got up earlier than her mother and she breakfasted in her room, too. On rainy days she fussed with things—mending something, pressing an evening dress.

"Do sit down. You drive me crazy, fiddling around so," Mrs. Robbins would say when she woke up.

They usually got out for luncheon—anyplace from the Colony or the St. Regis to one of the inexpensive tearooms you find on side streets. Mrs. Robbins was always discovering tearooms. "My dear," she would say to people, "you must go there! Real Southern cooking! Creole, you know," and then never go back herself.

They ate dinner late, and Mrs. Robbins was quite disgruntled if they had to eat alone. She didn't mind signing the check if she had guests at her hotel. It was, after all, no more than she would do if she were hostess in her own home. But she'd never pay a check when she was with a man, outside of her own hotel. That was different and not pretty.

The men Mrs. Robbins liked were substantial and in the Street, likely as not, or connected with some mysterious business which they never spoke about. Occasionally young men interested in one of the ~~airs~~ crept into Mrs. Robbins's acquaintanceship, but she didn't encourage them. Most of the time Lela was satisfied with whoever happened to be around.

"You're such a funny child," Mrs. Robbins would chide. "I was married and you were a great big girl by the time I was your age."

To her friends Mrs. Robbins would say, "I don't know what's the matter with Lela. She's too particular! Everyone can't marry Clark Gable, you know. Not that I don't want her with me, for I love her with me. And she's young, of course. But I do think that she ought to pay some attention to some man. Seriously, I mean."

Tonight Mrs. Robbins and Lela were dining with Alfred Mackintosh and Pete Bowles. Mackintosh was Mrs. Robbins's friend, a hearty, red-faced man given to long and off-

color stories. The point was usually so dull and the story so elongated that Lela minded only the length and not the fact that the story was dirty. Pete Bowles was a slender, fresh-faced young man who wrote advertising.

"I don't know what you see in him, Lela!" Mrs. Robbins said as they dressed. "He hardly opens his mouth. And he has no future. You can tell that by looking at him. He's the sort of man who ought to marry his stenographer. The clerk type!"

"I like him," said Lela.

"I know you do." Mrs. Robbins sighed as if Lela's choice was in itself enough to damn the young man.

Bowles came first, Mackintosh five minutes later. There were drinks in the small living room of the suite.

"Make mine very weak," Mrs. Robbins begged Mackintosh, who was mixing the drinks. "I don't want to drink much tonight." She drank three Scotch-and-sodas. Then they went to a little French restaurant Mackintosh knew about.

Mrs. Robbins had a cocktail before dinner. "As long as it has a whiskey base it won't hurt me," she said. Lela caught her mother's eye. "Lela's trying to get me not to drink," Mrs. Robbins said, chuckling. "Isn't that rich? The daughter telling the mother what to do! No wonder people won't believe I *am* her mother!"

One of the men should have turned to Mrs. Robbins at this point with a compliment about her youthful appearance. Bowles was busy, however, talking with Lela, and Mackintosh wasn't quick at compliments.

The dinner was good. There was a nice white wine, and Mrs. Robbins liked wine. When she discovered that Lela was watching her she made a little grimace, but she didn't say anything more about Lela's solicitude. After dinner there were two Scotch-and-sodas for Mrs. Robbins, and then they went to a newsreel theatre. Mrs. Robbins

had seen all of the good shows in town, she said, and there were no long movies she cared about. "Unless a movie is really good," she said, "I'd rather stay home and read." Mrs. Robbins never stayed home and read, but that, so far as she was concerned, was beside the point.

After the newsreels Mrs. Robbins decided that she wanted to dance. "The Stork Club's always fun," she said. "A nice crowd there."

At the Stork Club she had some champagne. They all danced. Lela didn't like the way Mackintosh held her and she was glad she could dance with Bowles most of the time. While they were dancing, he said what about lunch on Thursday, and Lela said Thursday would be fine. Bowles was very nice, she decided. Gentle and pleasant. Fun, too.

At two o'clock Mrs. Robbins said, "Let's get out of this rat-trap!"

Lela agreed enthusiastically. "If you go home now, Mother," she said, "you can get a lot of sleep. You've been complaining about not sleeping, you know."

"There's the girl!" Mrs. Robbins said. "Always wanting to go home!"

At Joe's Place on Third Avenue, Mrs. Robbins had brandies. First with soda and then straight. Lela gave up trying to keep her mother from drinking. By the time they left Joe's Place Mrs. Robbins had to cling to Mackintosh's arm.

"You go home if you want to," she said to Lela. "I want to have fun. I get little enough fun with a daughter who's always crabbing. If you weren't such—a *wallflower*!"

"Mother!" said Lela, and looked at Bowles. He didn't meet her eyes.

Mackintosh had to help Mrs. Robbins into the cab when they left the next bar. She fell asleep on his shoulder.

When they got to the hotel he had to help her up to her suite. He insisted then on coming in. Bowles and Lela followed them.

Mrs. Robbins sat down on the sofa and announced thickly that she wasn't speaking to anyone.

"She'll be all right," Lela said. "If you two want to go now..."

Bowles got up and said good night to Mrs. Robbins. Lela went with him to the door.

"It was a nice evening," he said.

"I'm glad you were with us," Lela said.

Bowles opened the door and then hesitated. "About Thursday—I just remembered. I'm afraid I can't make that lunch. One of my bosses is going to be in town on business."

Lela tried to smile.

"I'll telephone you," he said, and then he was gone.

Lela knew that he wouldn't telephone. She'd never hear from him again, or from the other men who would appear briefly and seem to like her a little. Only her mother's acquaintances would go on and on.

When she turned back to the living room, Mackintosh was sitting on the couch with his arm around Mrs. Robbins.

"How are you, sweetheart?" he asked. His voice was unsteady.

"She's got to go right to bed," Lela said. "If you'll just go."

"I'll help you."

"I don't need any help."

"Stop ordering people around!" said Mrs. Robbins, opening one eye. "Don't listen to her, Mac. She can't get married, that's her trouble."

Mackintosh got up, started to lift Mrs. Robbins and carry her into the bedroom.

"Please go!" said Lela. "I'll ask the hotel management to come up if you won't leave!"

"Oh, if that's the way you feel about it," he said, and found his hat and left.

"Come on, darling," Lela said gently. "Come on to bed. We're having lunch tomorrow with that nice Mr. Baker and you want to look nice, you know."

"To hell with Mr. Baker!"

"Now, Mother! You won't feel that way in the morning. See there. How nice your bed looks. I'll fix something you like to drink all ready for you when you get into it. Come on—that's right!"

She led her mother into the bedroom, undressed her, and finally tucked her into bed after the promised drink.

"There you are!" she said. "Have a nice sleep. Good night, darling."

SOPHIE JACKSON

BARBARA, Mrs. Watkins' youngest, jogged Sophie's elbow and the teacup slipped out of Sophie's hand and shattered on the kitchen floor. Sophie felt the blood hot in her head. She stood motionless, looking at the pieces.

"Mamma! Mamma!" Barbara's voice was shrill. "Sophie broke another teacup!"

Mrs. Watkins stood in the doorway. She seemed larger than usual—and she was always large. Her face was contorted with anger.

"I'm sorry!" Sophie Jackson mumbled. She stood there, a miserable little black figure. "It slipped when—when——"

"You're sorry!" said Mrs. Watkins. "And it's *my* teacup! The third piece out of my new set in three weeks! I won't have a piece of china left if this keeps on."

"I'll—I'll pay for it," Sophie volunteered.

"You'll pay for this, and for the others. And tomorrow you'll get up half an hour earlier and get the living room cleaned before Mr. Watkins comes down to breakfast! *Even he* noticed how dirty the room looked."

"Yes, ma'am." Sophie was glad to have the conversation veer to house cleaning.

"And those potatoes last night! I told you baked in the half shell, and they were mashed. I don't like mashed potatoes."

"I didn't have time—after you sent me to the store."

“Don’t answer back! I want meals the way I plan them! And you didn’t put the right number of chops on the table.”

“I took mine out first. I thought you said—”

Mrs. Watkins was in a frenzy now. She stood over the little colored girl as if she were about to strike her. “You—you—” And then she smiled suddenly, as if she hadn’t been in a fury. “Get your things and go!” she ordered. “You don’t appreciate a good home. You’re as worthless as all of the others! I don’t know how we women put up with you. Worthless. Lazy. The lot of you.”

Sophie wanted to say, “I get up every morning at half-past six. And I cook three meals a day. And clean and wash dishes. And take care of the children and bake cookies for them. And at night I’m alone in my room because you won’t let me go out. And this is all I get out of life.”

But she just stood there, not saying anything, and Mrs. Watkins went from veiled and smiling sarcasm back to anger.

“I’ll have your money ready for you after breakfast in the morning,” were her last words, as she flounced out of the kitchen.

Sophie finished the dishes. She put Barbara to bed. She told the two other children—who were older and didn’t mind her, ever—to go to bed. This night they made faces at her. They knew she was going away in the morning.

She went to her room. It was off the kitchen and it was furnished with a cot bed which sagged unbelievably in the middle, a chair with a broken seat, a chest of drawers, and an ironing board. The ironing board didn’t belong there, but there was no room for it in the kitchen, so Sophie found it more convenient just to make it part of her bedroom furnishings. What difference did it make? Mrs. Watkins didn’t want her to have company in her room, anyhow.

Sophie took two imitation-leather suitcases from the closet. Into the big one went her clothes and her mementos. A plaster dog from Coney Island. A birthday card. The handbag Mrs. Helms, her last mistress, had given her for Christmas. Two pictures of herself taken at a place that delivers the pictures to you, finished, in four minutes. The pictures didn't do Sophie justice. She was a smooth-faced girl, with sleek, golden-brown skin and kind eyes. The picture showed to advantage her stylish "wave" and her teeth and her smile, but it left out the patience and the hope and the submission that were a part of her.

Into the smaller suitcase—her beloved "overnight bag," which she was hoping to use, sometime, for a real week end—she put the pink celluloid toilet set Chet Morgan had given her two years ago when she was "going with" him. She wondered what had become of Chet. She never did hear from him after she changed her job, that time. She hadn't had a beau since, though she had smiled at a dozen brown young men in the neighborhood. She added her new dress—brown with red trimmings. And her white bungalow apron. She wished she could get a job where she could wear real uniforms.

The overnight bag she left open, so she could pack her nightgown and her soap and talcum powder in the morning, and went to sleep with the troubled feeling she always had after she'd been fired, though by now even this feeling was almost automatic. She'd been fired so many times! It must be her fault, of course, though even now she didn't know what she could do about it.

She never had had an easy time. She'd been working since she was eleven; she had helped her grandmother, then. At thirteen she had her first job on her own. A "mother's helper." She'd been fired because she'd left the children alone half an hour one night, and their mother

had come home unexpectedly. She was fired from the next job for snipping a bit of ribbon from an evening dress. The streamers on the bow had been so long, and she had wanted just a little piece so badly. She never had pretty things!

Then she'd been fired for answering back—and she did try so hard not to answer back. And for being lazy. And for breaking things. But she never had been fired for not knowing how to cook. She was a born cook. She knew about seasonings. How to get the tang of garlic without the actual taste of it. And when tarragon vinegar is better than cider. And when a pinch of saffron will help fish. She gathered recipes and pasted them in a book with "My Diary" in gold on the cover. But she had most of the rules for cooking in her head.

At some of the places where she worked they appreciated her cooking. And she stayed longer, then. Other places—this one, for instance—the cooking didn't really matter a great deal. But even the best places didn't last too long.

Looking back, there wasn't so much difference between the best and the worst places. Lazy mistresses or worried mistresses. Generous ones or those who, through nature or necessity, kept her from getting enough to eat. You got up early and set the table and cooked breakfast. Breakfast got lighter every year, but there was always toast and coffee and fruit—and eggs most of the time. Even this meant dozens of steps and dishes.

And, after breakfast, the work started. Beds to be made. "Don't forget to turn the mattress. You didn't turn it yesterday." Rooms to be cleaned. Silver to be polished. And one eye on the clock, so lunch wouldn't be late. And maybe a couple of visits to the store, during the morning.

"Why didn't you tell me you needed eggs? I believe you *like* to run to the store!"

After lunch, more dishes and more cleaning. And children coming home from school. Vegetables to prepare. Dinner—and more dishes. And washing on Monday and ironing on Tuesday. "Don't get Mr. Watkins' collars so stiff. These are *soft* shirts, Sophiel" And one room cleaned thoroughly each week. And staying in nights, so the children wouldn't be alone.

Nights off—every Thursday, if you were lucky, and every second Sunday. Going to the movies alone, unless you made friends with one of the girls working in the neighborhood.

The mistresses didn't want to be mean. Sophie knew that. But they were harassed too. Or were worried about money. Or had difficult husbands. Or wanted to be out of the house, away from the work, as much as they could be. Sophie didn't blame them. Instead, she dreamed of a job where the mistress would be gentle and kind and the children obedient and the house new—and lots of time off—and all the butter you wanted in the cooking.

She knew she wasn't a first-class servant, one of those superior girls who look stylish in a uniform and can demand big wages. But someplace there must be a job—

At two in the afternoon she was at the employment agency. That was a bad time to come, but she hadn't been able to get away from the Watkins house until after the children had their lunch. She could have stayed on, if she'd wanted to—Mrs. Watkins was in a softer mood by then—but she'd made up her mind to go. Might as well try something new!

So she sat on the hard bench in the employment agency and tried to look pleasing. She wished her coat were better. She smoothed her hair, hoped she looked nice.

Several women spoke to her, looked at the references—

the folds and the edges brown—wherein “To Whom it May Concern” was told that Sophie Jackson was entirely honest, nice with children, and a satisfactory houseworker. And no reason given why this treasure had been turned out on the world.

She sat there . . . and no one wanted her. She could get a room somewhere and come back in the morning. The other girls began to leave, two at a time, usually. She didn’t have any place to go now; might as well sit here. Then the woman in charge of the office beckoned. Sophie went into the inner office.

A young woman stood there. A mink coat was pulled high around her throat, though the day was not cold. Her eyes were large and mascaraed and her too-blond hair formed a sleek cap close to her head, with a ridiculous little hat perched on the side of it.

“Here is the girl I told you about,” said the woman in charge of the office. “She is the best I have here today. If you could get in early in the morning, Miss Trevor—”

Miss Trevor, Miss Joyce Trevor, couldn’t. “It is almost impossible for me to make morning appointments,” she stated. And didn’t say why.

“I think you’ll like this girl. She may not be your type exactly, but I know she is clean and honest.”

“Can you cook?” asked Miss Trevor.

“Yes’m, I’m a good cook,” Sophie answered. She wanted to say, “I’m a grand cook. I love cooking. I’m a nice girl. You’d like me.”

“You can bake a soufflé?”

“Yes’m. Cheese. Or chocolate. Or—or just egg.”

Miss Trevor looked at her now. Seemed puzzled, as if she didn’t know what to ask next.

“I do washing,” Sophie volunteered. “Table linens. And men’s shirts.”

“There are no men’s shirts,” Miss Trevor told her.

Sophie couldn't believe it. Was this one of the places she had heard of—one in family? She had never even aspired to a job like that! "You all by yourself?" she asked.

"Yes," said Miss Trevor.

No one spoke, then. The woman in charge suggested, finally, "You could give her a trial. You needn't pay us unless she stayed two weeks."

"All right." Miss Trevor mentioned wages—more than Sophie had ever had before! "When can you start?"

"Right away, now. I got my things here."

"Come on, then. You can come in the taxi with me."

The apartment was beautiful! Sophie had never seen anything like it. She kept making little wordless prayers about not breaking anything. The living room had yellow satin curtains and the walls were green. Miss Trevor's bedroom was pink and the guest room next to it was brown and beige. The dining room was dark blue and silver. The kitchen was tan and red. And Sophie's room had a set of matching furniture.

"I have an engagement for dinner," said Miss Trevor, after showing her around. "You just get your own. Tomorrow you can clean thoroughly. But don't make a noise in the morning. I'll be out late. See that I'm not disturbed until I ring for you."

"Yes'm." Sophie swallowed hard.

That was the beginning. At first Sophie had to pinch herself to be sure it was real. She wasn't sure even then.

The next morning she woke with a start—and at first thought that she had overslept. Eight o'clock! She tiptoed around, cleaned the living room, and then got to work on the small kitchen, handling things slowly and gingerly so as not to make a noise.

At ten she was alert for a sound from Miss Trevor's

room, but it was twelve before the bell rang. Sophie rushed to answer it.

Miss Trevor looked tired and pale without make-up, but she was sweet! All she wanted was a pot of coffee and some orange juice. Sophie prepared the tray quickly. "This looks very nice," Miss Trevor approved. Then: "A friend will be here for dinner tonight—Mr. Langford. What can we give him?"

"Did you want a soufflé?"

"Mercy, no! Why?"

"You asked if I could make them."

"I'd heard they were hard to make."

They decided on steak, a green vegetable, French fried onions, and a salad and cheese.

"You do the ordering," Miss Trevor directed. "You know how to order?"

"Of course," Sophie nodded. "And what do you want for lunch?"

"I won't be home to lunch," Miss Trevor said. "I won't be home until six. Dinner is at seven-thirty. Know how to mix a cocktail?"

"No, ma'am." Sophie knew there'd be a catch in it! She wanted to say, "I won't know so many things you'll ask me to do. But I can learn. And I'll try so hard—if you'll just put up with me." She didn't say anything at all.

Miss Trevor dressed and went away.

And Sophie had a holiday. At least it seemed like one, with nobody to yell at her. She straightened Miss Trevor's room, polishing the silver things on her dresser and the perfume bottles until everything sparkled.

She did the marketing, feeling very important and choosing the nicest things; then she set the table, got the vegetables ready, and still had hours of time! She turned on the radio, feeling vaguely wicked because she had so little to do.

Miss Trevor came home. Said hello very cheerfully. Looked at the dining-room table, changed the position of the knives just a little, told Sophie a few things about serving. Sophie knew how to serve, though most of the people she had worked for just wanted everything put on the table.

Mr. Langford was older than Sophie had thought he'd be. He was rather a heavy man, and might have been sixty. But he had a good appetite. That was something! He and Miss Trevor talked like people in a book or in the movies—sort of company manners, with Miss Trevor smiling at him and telling him what she'd done all day and making little jokes. As she brought in each dish Sophie watched them both out of the tail of her eye and prayed things were all right.

After dinner she was washing the dishes when Miss Trevor came in. "That was a very nice dinner," she began. "But next time bring Mr. Langford a big cup of coffee."

"Oh, I'm so sorry! You didn't say coffee, and I thought—"

"It's all right. You did fine," Miss Trevor smiled. And she didn't accuse her of talking back!

"What shall I do now, ma'am?" asked Sophie.

"Whatever you wish. Go out if you like."

"Every night?"

"Why not? What else is there to do?"

It was wonderful! And it got even more wonderful as the days passed. Miss Trevor found out that Sophie liked company. "Why, when you do have six it's just about the same as where I was before, when they were alone," Sophie assured her.

"My other maids objected to company."

"That's funny. There ain't nothing here to do!" And really, there wasn't much. Breakfast (if you could call it breakfast) at twelve. Sometimes a bite of lunch for Miss

Trevor at three. Or maybe a guest for cocktails at five and no lunch at all. Dinners two or three times a week. Company not oftener than once or twice. Laundry—Miss Trevor's lovely silk things that were fun to wash out in bright suds and dry between towels before you pressed them so carefully.

At the end of the week Miss Trevor bought uniforms for Sophie. Blue and white for morning. Crisp black nylon, with the thinnest of collars and cuffs and aprons, for afternoons.

"You're going to keep me on?" Sophie hadn't dared ask before.

"Of course."

Sophie looked her gratitude and prayed that nothing would go wrong.

The next day she broke a crystal ash tray!

She was still trembling when Miss Trevor got home. She'd tell her, of course. And offer to pay. But what if Miss Trevor got angry? "Don't let her scold me too much!" Sophie prayed. Meanwhile she had polished the silver, waxed the floors, and washed the windows.

"Miss Trevor," she began as soon as she had taken her mistress' wraps.

"What's the matter?"

"I—I dropped a—one of the big glass ash trays. I don't know how it happened. It fell out of my hand."

"So what?" asked Miss Trevor.

"It broke. I mean I broke it. You can take it out of my wages. I couldn't help it."

"Of course you couldn't help it. Forget it," said Miss Trevor. And picked up a post card. "Look at that!" she sniffed. "Why do people try to be funny on post cards?"

Miss Trevor's guests were all nice to Sophie. Before this,

guests hadn't paid any attention to her, beyond asking her for things or eying her suspiciously.

Now Sophie knew all the guests.

"Mr. Langford is bringing a Mr. Roberts tonight. You might bake that fish with the sauce. Mr. Roberts is an important lawyer, and he'll appreciate a good home dinner."

At the table that night, when Sophie passed second helpings, Miss Trevor remarked, "This dish is a specialty of Sophie's. Her own recipe."

Mr. Roberts smiled at her as if she were a real person. "And *very* good it is, too, Sophiel"

Later they called into the kitchen, "That was a fine dinner, Sophie. You're some cook!"

That went on all the time. Mr. Langford brought her a big bottle of perfume. A Mr. Simmons gave her a scarf. Jack Shallon, whom she thought she wouldn't like at all at first, always stopped in the kitchen to say hello, and every couple of weeks he gave her a dollar for the movies.

Mr. Langford gave her five dollars toward a new dress! A woman who was a handkerchief buyer brought her two dozen handkerchiefs, all colors.

But that was nothing compared with what Miss Trevor did. Miss Trevor gave Sophie a beautiful coat, almost like new. And three hats. And three street dresses. And an evening dress. And all her stockings, as soon as they had little runs in them. And lingerie. Everything! Sophie didn't have to spend anything at all except on shoes; she couldn't get into Miss Trevor's.

Miss Trevor had a nice life, Sophie thought. A wonderful life, really. Daytimes she went shopping or visited one of her women friends. She had only a few, but they were almost as nice as Miss Trevor. At night Mr. Langford or one of her other friends took her out. They went to all

the new plays. And to night clubs. And to the movies, too. They danced until late at night.

Miss Trevor told Sophie all about things in the morning as she sipped her orange juice. "It was such fun! We went to a new place—the Sunrise Club, they call it. A man Mr. Langford knows did the decorations. All the colors of sunrise, and a lot of mirrors make it look as if the sun was really rising. And we had little melted-cheese things with our drinks. You might make some sometime."

Or: "It was a Cuban place. Very nice. With Cuban music. I danced with Mr. Langford. And with Mr. Ross—you remember the tall blond man who was here Tuesday a week ago?"

"I remember," Sophie nodded. "We had roast goose."

Once in a while Miss Trevor spent an evening at home. Sophie would fix a tray for her and she'd have it in her room. Sliced cold chicken. Salad. A fluffy dessert. And Miss Trevor would talk. That's when she'd show she was fond of Sophie. It frightened Sophie a little.

"You're one of the few real friends I've got in the world," Miss Trevor told her once. "I know how much you do for me, working so hard every day."

"It's easy, Miss Trevor, really it is," Sophie said.

"I wouldn't like it," said Miss Trevor, "alone all the time. I hate being alone!"

Sophie wondered why Miss Trevor looked so sad. Whenever she was alone evenings she looked sad. She was all right during the day.

Mr. Langford came nearly every evening. Once in a while, when he didn't come, some other man would take Miss Trevor out; but Mr. Langford always knew, and they'd joke about it later.

Once a week or so Mr. Langford would stay all night in the little guest room. Miss Trevor explained that he lived on Long Island and those were the nights they'd stayed

out so late he'd missed the last train. Sophie would take his breakfast in when he rang for it. He liked heartier things—scrambled eggs and bacon and toast. He didn't even wake Miss Trevor in the morning. He'd leave while she was still asleep, after thanking Sophie for the breakfast and giving her a dollar.

"What a head!" he'd say, usually. "I drank too much again."

Everyone drank too much, Sophie decided. She hated to think that Miss Trevor had a fault, but Miss Trevor had too many morning-after headaches too. Sophie tried to hint to her that maybe, with less to drink, she'd feel better. It was easy to say that to Miss Trevor without being impudent.

"You're right," Miss Trevor admitted. "But how can a person go on, night after night, without drinking? How can you face life?"

"You could come home earlier."

"And miss all the fun. That would be a help! . . . Sophie, you're a nice girl. I'd hate to think of going on, day after day, without you."

"I'll be here as long as you want me," Sophie promised.

And then Miss Trevor fell in love! And *not* with Mr. Langford! With a young man, tall and thin and dark, named Dunlap Craig. Sophie, who compared everyone to motion-picture stars, was ready when Miss Trevor asked her what she thought of him. "He looks a little like Basil Rathbone," she asserted.

"But he's a villain," Miss Trevor laughed.

Sophie nodded. "I know."

"You don't like Mr. Craig."

"He's all right."

It was plain that Miss Trevor liked him a lot. When she was with him she was lifted up. Gay. It was, thought

Sophie, as if someone had turned on a whole row of Christmas-tree lights inside her. Yet sometimes she seemed sort of sad, underneath. It frightened Sophie. She didn't want anything to change. . . .

One night Mr. Craig came to get Miss Trevor. She had on a new white chiffon dress, and her blond hair was like a golden cap. But she had lavender shadows under her eyes. Mr. Craig had on a dinner coat and looked startlingly black and white—and very wicked, Sophie thought.

They'd hardly been gone an hour when the telephone rang. It was Mr. Langford. "May I speak to Miss Trevor, Sophie?" he asked. Sophie was just about to say, "She isn't at home," when Mr. Langford went on, "If her head aches badly and she's asleep, don't wake her."

Why, Miss Trevor hadn't had a headache! She felt fine because she was going out with Mr. Craig. "I—I—" Sophie gulped. "I—I guess she's asleep. Her—her head ached. Yes, sir."

The next morning when Sophie put Miss Trevor's tray in front of her she said, "Mr. Langford called last night."

"He did?" Miss Trevor put a hand on Sophie's shoulder. "Yes'm. He asked for you."

"What did you say?" Miss Trevor's nails nipped into Sophie's shoulder.

"He said not to call you if your head ached. And I said yes, you were sleeping."

Miss Trevor laughed and laughed. It wasn't as funny as that, Sophie knew. "You're wonderful, Sophie!" she said.

Sophie didn't feel wonderful as the days passed. Miss Trevor was making too many excuses not to see Mr. Langford. Sophie didn't see why she didn't stop seeing him altogether. But sometimes she'd see him and be sweet. And then say she wasn't at home when he called—if she was seeing Mr. Craig later. She didn't want to make Mr. Langford angry. And yet, when she was with Mr. Craig,

Sophie felt, Miss Trevor didn't care for anyone else, didn't care what happened.

Sophie wondered if they were going to get married. Miss Trevor was too pretty to be single, anyhow. And Mr. Langford was too old for her. Mr. Craig, now, was just the right age, and handsome—even if he did look like a villain.

"He's sure good-looking," she told Miss Trevor.

But looks weren't enough. Miss Trevor and Mr. Craig quarreled. Sophie never knew why. Mr. Craig didn't call for several days. And Miss Trevor saw Mr. Langford instead. Every night. And she sort of wilted, like a flower that has been cut for one day too long.

Then Mr. Craig telephoned, and that evening he was back again! Miss Trevor was so gay! All the lights inside her had been turned on.

Sophie was happy because Miss Trevor was happy. Everything was like a holiday. And Mr. Craig gave her five dollars and told her to buy some new stockings, but she felt he wouldn't care if she sent it to her aunt in Birmingham instead.

Then Miss Trevor and Mr. Craig had another quarrel, and Mr. Langford came back. But that night Mr. Langford and Miss Trevor quarreled. Afterward Miss Trevor told Sophie:

"If anyone but Mr. Craig calls, I'm not home." But no one called at all. Three days—and no one who counted called. Just some stray acquaintances. Sometimes Miss Trevor would go out. And rush right back. But there were never any calls she cared about.

One night Miss Trevor called Sophie to her room. She was sitting at her dressing table wearing a pale pink negligee over her gown, and it frothed on the floor in a little pink wave. Her hair wasn't as sleek as usual and the

shadows under her eyes were deeper. But Sophie thought she looked more beautiful than she had ever seen her.

Miss Trevor held a little box in her hand. "This is for you," she said. "It's to—to remember me by."

"I'll always remember you," Sophie declared.

"I know—but this is to help. Now promise me something. You sometimes go rather late to see that girl who lives on the other side of town, don't you? Well, you go there tonight. And let her keep this for you."

"Yes," said Sophie.

"You're a good girl, Sophie. You've helped me."

"Thank you, Miss Trevor."

Sophie looked in the box as soon as she was in her room. Rings and pins and a bracelet. "I guess it's a lot of junk she didn't want to keep," thought Sophie. It seemed sort of silly to take it over to Mabel's tonight. But she had promised Miss Trevor. So she put on her hat and coat and took the box with her. It wasn't her fault that Mabel wasn't at home. It never occurred to her to leave the box anywhere else, so she brought it back with her and put it on top of her chest of drawers.

She had got into the habit of sleeping late, and when she woke up the sunlight was already in her bedroom. She wondered how Miss Trevor was feeling. Well, she hadn't been drinking, so she wouldn't have a headache, anyhow. She wished Mr. Craig would stay away and Mr. Langford would come back and things would be the way they'd been in the beginning.

Sophie got up finally, made her bed, put her room to rights. Then she saw the box. How funny Miss Trevor had been about that! She'd take it over to Mabel's in the evening.

She cleaned the living room, making as little noise as possible. Her broom handle hit against a chair and she held her breath. . . . Thank goodness, there was no sound from Miss Trevor's room.

No, there was no sound from Miss Trevor's room. Twelve o'clock, and still no sound. And one o'clock. Sophie began to worry. For Miss Trevor had gone to bed so early. It wasn't as if she'd been out dancing until early morning.

At two o'clock she couldn't stand it. She had to go in! What if Miss Trevor was ill—needed her?

She knocked on the door. There was no answer. She opened the door, stepped into the bedroom.

She looked at Miss Trevor, there on the bed. White and beautiful. Still wearing the pink negligee with the frothy hem. Sophie ran shrieking from the apartment and pressed her finger on the elevator bell until the elevator boy was with her. "Miss Trevor—" she began. And couldn't go on. The boy went back into the apartment with her.

It was sleeping tablets—a whole box of them—self-administered, the police said. Half a dozen policemen poured into the apartment, pawed over Miss Trevor's lovely things. Asked questions. In Sophie's room one of them found the little box. "Who does this belong to?"

"It's mine," Sophie told him. "Miss Trevor gave it to me."

He called another officer. "Look what this gal was trying to get away with! Didn't even have sense enough to get it out of sight. Said the Trevor dame gave it to her."

"Maybe she did."

"Yeah? The first thing those maids who hang around women like Trevor learn is how to steal."

There was nothing more for Sophie to do in the apartment. She packed her things into the two suitcases. Her new dresses. Her new hats. Her new perfume. She went up to the employment agency, sat down on the hard bench to wait until somebody wanted her.

It seemed silly to go on. Miss Trevor had had so much

more than Sophie could ever have—and she hadn't gone on.

The clerk in charge called Sophie into the front office. A woman stood there. Fat, middle-aged, efficient, rather cross-looking.

"Have you ever worked for a family with three children, done all the cooking and washing, taken care of everything?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You're not afraid of hard work?"

"No, ma'am."

"You're honest? Don't drink or keep bad company?"

"No, ma'am."

Sophie knew all the questions. She knew what would happen. The big, ugly house. The three children, quarreling with one another, impudent to their parents and to her, most of all. The big wash on Monday; and all the ironing to do Tuesday morning. Boiled dinners. Putting up preserves. Seeing the children got to bed. Staying home evenings. And getting up early in the morning.

There was nothing else. There had never been anything else but a miracle. And that was over. Miss Trevor was dead.

"... to appreciate a good home."

Her new mistress was through talking. Sophie knew she had to make an answer. And the answer always had to be the same. Without comment. Without interpretation. Without impudence.

"Yes, ma'am."

THE ACTRESS

THE TELEPHONE RANG. As if an audience were watching, Zala Cassell put her newspaper on the table, and sat very straight. As she reached for the telephone, the sleeve of her negligee fell away from her only slightly flabby arm. The negligee was lace trimmed, a trifle soiled.

"This is Madame Cassell!" Her voice was rich and deep.

"It's Mr. Chamberlain, Madame," said the operator.

"You may put him on, dear," said Madame. Madame insisted that callers be announced, and accepted each of her calls hopefully—though most of them proved disappointing.

"Madame Cassell? I didn't awaken you?"

"Horace! How good to hear you! I've been awake for hours! I used to say I didn't trust the actress who woke up before noon. But time, my dear Horace—"

"You're wonderful! I hope you aren't busy tonight, Madame. Could you have dinner with me at the Stork Club?"

"Just a minute, dear boy—" Madame Cassell sat perfectly still. Then, "I had to look in my engagement book. I had a dull date. I'd much rather be with you, dear Horace!"

"At eight then, Madame?"

A very nice dinner date with the most attractive man she knew! Horace Chamberlain was in his thirties—and

rich. He wasn't in love with her. Why, if she'd had a son he might be older than Horace! But all she had was Horace. He was overcome by her background, by the aura she created. As long as she kept him interested, he didn't think about other women. Horace was easily influenced—and she was influencing him to be attentive to her. She needed attention. If Horace met the right girl, he'd make a perfect husband. Madame didn't like to think of that, and when he introduced her to the girls he knew, she was always able to let him see just how shallow and conniving they were.

She knew a lot of men. Old actors, who liked to spend endless hours talking about the theater, preferably while drinking her liquor. Occasionally she had to appear with one of them at charity affairs, and then it was part of her art to be interested and gracious and appealing. There were still a few rich old men around, who had been stage-door Johnnys but who now wanted to be seen with very young girls, to simulate youth. There were writers who liked to draw her out in order to use her in stories. That meant occasional good meals and resultant publicity. But the old ones had to be inexact about her to disguise their own age, and the young ones made her a museum piece. Social climbers—whom she would have refused years ago—felt she added distinction to their parties, and occasionally she allowed them to fawn on her as she talked of when she'd played with Richard Mansfield and William Faversham and Philip Henley. Mrs. Campbell, Mrs. Fiske, and the others were all gone . . . Horace Chamberlain treated her like a real person. She needed him.

Zala Cassell lived in an apartment hotel in the West Fifties. Not as chic as East of Fifth—but smarter than if it had been nearer Broadway. To a connoisseur, *au courant* with the newest in décor, the apartment might have

seemed hideous, cluttered, and dingy. Madame considered it a distinguished background.

"I have my own things," she said with dignity. Pictures framed in deep oak or narrow black molding hung on the walls, and silver-framed ones stood around the room. One of Madame as she had appeared in "Lady Windermere's Fan" was in a frame of green velvet with insets of jade. It was from an admirer she'd long forgotten.

The telephone rang again, and Madame went through her routine. It was the president of a women's club, and after the necessary hesitation Madame promised to speak at a luncheon, without charge, if a member called for her in a private car.

"I loathe taxicabs," said Madame.

The next call was from Lew Marstan. Lew was one of the oldest theatrical producers in New York; Madame had known him since he was an office boy in the Harris office.

"How's my girl?" His voice was too hearty. "How's the greatest star on Broadway?"

"I'm sure she's fine, and so am I," said Madame.

"You're a great one!" He laughed. "I've got something very interesting for you."

"Going to star me in 'Macbeth'?" He'd promised that, twenty years before.

"I wish to heaven I could!" he said.

"I know!" Her voice was soft. A beautiful, entirely impossible dream.

"You'll like this maybe just as well. Philip Henley—"

"Philip Henley has been dead for ten years!" There was a thickening in her throat and her eyes filled.

"As if I didn't know! This is his son, Madame. As fine-looking a young fellow as you ever saw."

In that moment, Philip Henley seemed the only man she had ever loved. He had been younger than she—which

she now felt was the reason they had never married.

They'd played together in half a dozen plays, and all but one had disappeared. But "Hamlet" had not disappeared. Philip Henley had been second only to John Barrymore, she felt. She had played the Queen Mother. Philip Henley had had beauty and fire and charm.

They had been madly in love. The way, it seemed to her, only theater people can love. With a mixture of reality and illusion. Philip had been unpredictable, emotional, a bit mad. And a great actor! That was the most important thing! They had loved and had been happy. And they had quarreled, and now the quarrels seemed almost the best. All through their love had been their love of the theater—their emotions had been mixed with their acting. She could see herself as she had been then—slim and graceful, her face smooth, her lips warm, her eyes enigmatic. Sure of herself—of the world—of Philip Henley. Then the quarrels had grown frequent and serious. They'd both been jealous, and pigs for publicity. She remembered those last emotional scenes. Too bad there'd been no audiences, no recordings. The other men she had loved hadn't been so wonderful. Philip Henley—dead these ten years. . . .

"Are you there?" Marstan asked.

"Of course!" said Madame. "Philip Henley's son—"

"I've put him under contract. I've got a play called 'Tension,' by young Simmons, who wrote 'Over the Fence.'"

"'Over the Fence' ran two weeks," said Madame. "The second week they had to give out orchids to keep the house from echoing."

"He's learned a lot. There's a fat part for Henley."

"Can he act?" asked Madame.

"You're always telling me that actors are puppets, and directors pull the strings."

"But the actor must be pliant, have sensitivity, training, be able to take direction, to mimic emotion, to feel—"

"The boy's got all that."

"Without training, I suppose."

"I want you to coach him. That's the idea, Madame."

"A raw, untrained boy!"

"Look at the job you did with Alice Jensen."

"The girl has talent. Though it's true I worked—"

"I give you credit! Wait till you see this boy! The resemblance is uncanny. He's bound to inherit the old man's talent. And you don't object to the money?"

"Money, unfortunately, is never objectionable."

"Well, what about luncheon?"

"Today? Impossible, Lew!"

"Then tea—at the Plaza at four. I'll pick you up. There's one thing more. He's got a girl. Pretty as a picture."

"Oh, Lord!"

"What's the matter with his having a girl? I'm giving her the part opposite him—practically a bit part. I'll call for you." Lew Marstan hung up before Madame could object.

Philip Henley's son! She half listened to the others who called, answering automatically in her silken, husky voice, which would have sounded affected in anyone else. She tried to finish the newspapers. She mulled over the theatrical columns—deciding whether the new plays would succeed, if the choice of cast were wise. Time passed slowly. Why should she be so perturbed over a chance of coaching? She'd had dozens of pupils these last years, when chances to teach had become more frequent than acting offers. As long as it was the theater! It was important to pass the torch. Her pupils had done well, when they'd had any feeling for acting. She taught them how to express emotions, but the love of the theater had to be there. There was Alice Jensen. A little tramp. Mean. Cruel. Selfish. An opportunist. But she had a deep understanding of acting. She knew how to bring emotions out of

herself and throw them over the footlights. The girl would go to the top. And never be grateful to Madame! Why should she be? She'd earned the money to pay for the lessons. She'd known Madame could give her what she needed. A smooth, suave alley cat who had the ability to get what she wanted. Madame hadn't been grateful to those who had helped her. Youth doesn't figure that way. Alice Jensen, fighting her way up, would have excitement, love, quarrels. Madame could visualize her odd, blue-green, slanting eyes, her mouse-colored hair—auburn this season—her lithe, expressive body, her oddly provocative mouth. Alice would make people feel deeply. Maybe helping a girl like Alice Jensen was doing enough for the theater she loved. And now there was Philip Henley's son!

She dressed carefully. She smoothed on her most flattering make-up, but couldn't hide the wrinkled skin under her eyes. Perhaps it was just as well it wasn't the first Philip Henley she was going to see! She put on her plainest black gown and her smartest hat.

She was confident, almost patronizing, when Marstan called for her.

"You look wonderful, Madame!" said Marstan. "I planned this whole thing just to get a look at you."

She laughed politely. In the theater, she respected Marstan. Out of the theater she couldn't stand him.

"You'll like young Henley," he said. "The girls will go wild. The boy's inherited what it takes."

"From his father or mother?"

"You know his mother couldn't act."

"She brought up the boy."

"What of it? You'll see! As for his girl, she's a nice little thing. Had experience in summer stock."

Madame saw young Henley the minute she came into the lobby. He was taller than his father but curiously like

Philip Henley before the years and emotions had marked him. But the older actor's face had been leaner, his cheekbones more pronounced, his nose sharper. The girl was soft and sweet-looking, the type that would have to start dieting in a year or two.

They sat at a round table and ordered tea. The boy had nice manners.

"I know you're honored because Madame Cassell has agreed to coach you," Marstan said.

"I can't coach anyone unless he has a real feeling for the theater," said Madame. "Real emotion!"

Young Henley laughed.

"Most of the emotion I've seen around the theater is pretty phony," he said. "I'm a quick study, but I don't know anything about acting. Most of the actors I know are pretty dumb, but still, I want to learn the ropes. If Madame will give me some pointers—"

Madame closed her eyes and hoped the shudders didn't show. Philip's son!

"Madame knows there is something more than saying the words. I want her to teach you the inside," Marstan said.

"If there is an inside, I'd like to learn it. But not a lot of elocution and stuff. I like actors to seem natural."

"An actor should appear to be natural, to be the person he is portraying, but emotional scenes require expression, even when they're underplayed," said Madame.

The girl—her name was Lucile Carter—giggled.

"I think it's silly to take the stage too seriously," she said. "I think it's fun to be an actress, but, personally, I think a lot of all that stuff is nonsense. I think being a wife is more important. I believe there's a good woman behind every man who succeeds!"

"You have everything all set, I see," said Madame.

"Now, let's plan about the coaching," said Marstan hastily. "If Madame will arrange with Philip—"

Back in her apartment, Madame decided that the experience had been a million times worse than she'd dreamed it could be. Philip Henley's son being drowned in convention! Buried alive with kindness! Without an emotion in his undoubtedly perfectly normal heart! Just another young man—without feeling, without temperament, without love for the theater! Her Philip Henley, when he was young, had been impudent, impolite, erratic, ruthless, unthinking. But he'd had feeling, emotion, depth. The theater had been his love, as it was hers.

Lucile Carter would make some man a fine wife. But not young Henley! A good actor must have emotion, not a pleasant acceptance of life. Her mind ran around and around.

She had a good time at the Stork Club with Horace Chamberlain. When she could get young Henley out of her mind! Wasn't he just a young actor—to coach? In the Cub Room, everyone broke rules against table hopping and came over to her table.

"You are always the most glamorous woman in any place," said Horace. He was the perfect escort. She didn't know what she'd do without him! He'd make a fine husband for some lucky girl, but without him she'd have to depend on sporadic escorts. Dear Horace!

Young Henley appeared the next day, promptly at two. Polite. Not too interested. He paused in front of a tinted and framed portrait of his father.

"Mother has that picture," he said. "He must have been a great fellow!" Madame detected smug condescension.

Madame felt a tightening of her throat, an overwhelming despair. "Philip Henley was a credit to the American theater," she said.

Philip read his lines. He might have been a clothing-store dummy with phonographic attachment. Marstan had sent Madame the play, and she'd read it that morning. Not a bad play, if acted by eager and a bit eccentric young people. A play of modern and rebellious youth. Not for this pleasant mannequin!

Not that he didn't try. He repeated, parrotlike, the things she suggested.

"I'm rather modern—I believe in underplaying," he said.

"The emotion has got to be underneath, suppressed, if you want to underplay."

"Sure! But this isn't a very emotional speech!"

"How right you are!" Madame hid her own emotion.

He walked around, looked out the window. "Imagine living in a hotel room all these years!" he said.

"It isn't exactly a room. It's an apartment. And I haven't always lived here. I had a house in the East Sixties. And I've lived abroad." She was angry at herself because she felt it necessary to explain to this stupid child.

"Oh, it's very—interesting, here. Lucile likes the country. Not really the country, that is—"

"The suburbs?" Madame's voice was smooth.

"Well, yes. Near the water, with a big living room, and a place to eat on the lawn."

"How delightful!" said Madame.

The rehearsals went on. Philip became letter perfect—with wooden exactness. Getting the words and none of the feeling. He might be adequate in summer stock, but he wasn't good. Madame could teach him to throw his voice, but she couldn't put sympathy and meaning into him. He didn't underplay; he just didn't play at all. The theater, as theater, escaped him. Philip Henley's son!

Well, she could teach young Philip Henley to act, parrotlike. Maybe he—a boy with real physical beauty, whose father had been a great and beloved actor—could

get away with it. But it was a horrible thing to do—to the theater, to the memory of Philip Henley.

Madame was completely miserable. More miserable than she'd been when she found she was growing old. Or when she knew she and Philip Henley no longer loved each other. Philip Henley's son, given into her keeping to turn into an actor, and there was nothing she could do! There had to be something!

She stood in front of the picture of Philip Henley. Philip, handsome and unpredictable and passionate—It was almost as if she were praying to him.

"Help me, Philip!" she said. "Help your son, and the theater! The theater we both love! Philip, my dear one!"

Marstan telephoned to find out how things were going. She tried to tell him.

"Nonsense!" he said. "You're always pessimistic at this stage. The kid says he's getting along fine."

No help there!

If she were thirty years younger, she would know what to do. Wasn't it Philip Henley who had taught her to use physical attraction? If she were young, she could awaken young Philip, give him an interest in living, make the world come alive for him. But even in this emergency, Madame Cassell didn't have the power to regain her lost youth. And Philip's silly girl could do nothing for him. A nice enough girl—for a man who needed a girl like that. But young Philip needed sparks, clashes. He was Philip Henley's son! And his face showed a sleeping talent.

Alice Jensen came to see her. She'd had a successful season, and she'd bought some good clothes. You had to look twice to remember she was a tramp. Her face was without make-up, except for her mouth, which was very red. Madame had to look into her slanting blue-green eyes to know the kind of girl she really was. Alice wanted

something. She wasn't the girl to come calling otherwise.

"I've had two offers—neither one worth a dime. Both trying to cash in on last season. Do you know of a perfect part? You know everything that goes on!"

Madame recognized the tiny sop of flattery. "I wish I did know of one!" she said. And meant it. The girl had sultry sex and a passion for the theater.

"I want to show what I can do!" Alice stretched out luxuriously on the hideous velours sofa, which became a voluptuous background. "None of those sweet-girl-graduate parts; I want the kind of part you'd want if you were nineteen."

Madame knew Alice was twenty-four. "I'll keep you in mind," she promised.

After the girl had left, she stayed in Madame's mind. The sensuous mouth, the high cheekbones, the determined chin. Yes, Philip Henley would have liked her! Maybe—maybe this was the answer!

She couldn't do it! Simply couldn't! Not even for the theater. Not even for the memory of Philip Henley. Why should she? What did she have to gain?

She had nothing to gain! And she didn't like to lose. And here she was planning to give up the things she liked best—admiration, flattery, going places. But she had an idea that she'd had a sort of sign—and she had to do something, didn't she? This was the only thing she could think of.

Horace Chamberlain telephoned to ask her to have dinner with him. She held her breath. She had never bothered about other people's affairs before. But this was for the theater, which she loved most of all.

She threw out the bait, threw it away in her best fashion. "I'd love to come," she said. "May I bring someone with me? A dear little girl who is in New York for the first time. She wants to be an actress, but I'm afraid

she isn't the type at all. She's practically alone here—"

"I'll be delighted to have her," he said. "It's your evening, you know."

She telephoned Lucile Carter. It seemed a shame to do such a good deed for such a silly child. But it was the only way!

"I'm having dinner with a man I think you'd enjoy," she said. "It would help me out a lot if you'd come along. He's a wonderful man, so charming you don't have to remember he has a lot of money. Just the three of us!"

"You're not asking Philip?"

If the girl really loved Philip she might not come! But Madame felt she was a grasping little thing who wanted to do the best she could for herself.

"No, you see he asked just me, but I'm so much too old for him. I hoped you—"

"I'll be glad to come," said Lucile Carter, "if it will help you out, Madame."

"It certainly will help me!" Madame said.

The evening was a great success. Such a success that Madame wanted to stop it. Instead, she was the charming older woman interested in these dear young people. She drew out Lucile Carter—let her say the things that were so unbelievably right—to Horace Chamberlain. She was the girl who wanted a home in the suburbs, a car and babies, and the country club. These were the things Madame knew that Horace Chamberlain wanted, though he'd never said so in the rarefied atmosphere created by Madame.

Before long, the two were deep in discovery. And Madame sat there, smiling, and feeling, dramatically, like Marie Antoinette on her way to the guillotine.

She tried to feel sad as she went to sleep. Instead, she was pleasantly excited. Things were happening! She'd feel sad later, when she was alone. . . .

She telephoned Lew Marstan the next morning.

"If you'll help, young Henley may be all right."

"He can act. I told you!" Marstan chuckled.

"I'm not sure. There's something wrong. That part opposite him. Lucile Carter can't bring him out."

"It's not a large part."

"Large enough to spoil the play."

"But he's crazy about the girl."

"If you want the show to close in two weeks..."

"What can I do?"

"You can find a good ingénue who will help the play."

"If you really think so. There's Esther Shelby."

"Heavens, no! Plump as a pigeon."

"Dorothy James."

"Sad-looking! The world on her shoulders."

"Who do you want, anyhow?"

"It's up to you, Lew. You're casting. But I do want the play to succeed. All the work—Henley's first play—"

"You're right! But you want the impossible. An ingénue with brains! Like Alice Jensen!"

"Lew, she'd be perfect!"

"We'd never get her. She'd want a lot of money—But if you'll talk to her—"

"If you'd like me to, Lew. Then with Berkley for the older man, and Janice Holling, you'd have a star cast."

Madame planned another date for Lucile and Horace, and smiled to herself. They'd go on from there! Now, if . . . She waited nearly a week. She couldn't tell by Philip's bland face if anything had happened to him. But if she were to push matters—She telephoned Alice Jensen and asked her to tea. She said to Philip, after his coaching lesson, "Will you drop in at five? A young actress is coming in. I never know what to talk about to those young girls."

And there they were! Another threesome! But this

wasn't like the Stork Club dinner. Philip was politely indifferent. Alice Jensen's slanting blue-green eyes held hidden questions. Madame served tea, spoke airy nothings. Then:

"I wanted you two to know each other. Philip is going into rehearsal next week in the new Marstan play, 'Tension.' It occurred to Lew and me that the two of you together—"

"My friend, Miss Carter, has the part," said Philip.

"She hasn't much experience and doesn't seem—interested," said Madame.

"Is it an important part?" asked Alice.

"Not many sides," said Madame. "But Philip will come in for a lot of publicity, and the part is interesting, could be developed—"

"Can you act?" asked Alice of young Philip.

Philip bridled. "Of course!" he said. "Madame has been coaching—"

"He can learn to act," said Madame. "If he has inherited—"

"You don't have to inherit acting," said Philip. "You just—act."

Alice's sensuous mouth curled. Madame hadn't realized how firm was her determined chin.

"I'm sure!" she purred. "It's just—saying the lines, isn't it? The way Madame teaches you. I'd like to read the script, Madame. If I think it suitable for me..."

Madame nodded. She could see the girl muscling in, just as Madame had expected. Alice would cleverly upstage the unsuspecting Philip, and take over his publicity and the honors that belonged to him.

"I'm sure you'll like the role," said Madame.

Philip was angry—and it was the first time Madame had ever seen him show any emotion. Wonderful! He became unsure of himself, almost pouted, in a sort of

juvenile way. He wanted Lucile's flattery, Madame knew. And she smiled to herself.

Alice's voice grew colorless, the way it always got when she was excited. Underplaying. A great girl, Alice Jensen!

As she left, she brushed her lips lightly against Madame's withered but perfectly rouged cheek. "Thanks, loads! I'll be seeing you," she said. There was a mixture of malice and pleasure in the slanting eyes.

Alley cat! thought Madame, and smiled one of her most gracious smiles.

Now she could make an actor out of young Henley. She and Alice Jensen! He'd feel Lucile had jilted him, and that would help. Alice was fire and emotion. She didn't want a house in the suburbs. She wanted the theater. Fighting and passion. She'd rouse that nice young man out of his lethargy. She'd fan his pale liking for the theater into flame.

Rehearsals started. Lucile Carter was given a bit part and didn't mind at all. And then, after a week's rehearsal, she quit, and the part was cut out. Madame continued to praise Lucile to Horace. Horace didn't need the praise; he was already ripe for matrimony.

Young Henley was no longer being coached. He was too busy at rehearsals. He was worried and unsure of himself. He was beginning to think.

Madame went to some of the rehearsals, but, despite an outward show of respect, she wasn't important there. The director and the actors were an integrated whole, with the author called in when a new line was needed. Madame loved it—the bare stage, the few spotlights, the cast in street clothes. Jimmie Fielding was a fine director. He hammered at the boy harder than she had dared to. Alice Jensen was fluid, smooth—she made you think of a pretty young green snake.

Philip grew more uncertain. His calm acceptance of himself as an actor's son, able to get what he wanted—a part in a Broadway show, a pretty girl, the promise of acclaim—these had disappeared. His amiable girl had been succeeded by a mysterious creature who ignored him or stepped on his toes, and a director who bit into his self-satisfaction. Madame smiled at his bewilderment, as Alice slid into star billing. Why, the boy would be a feeder of lines unless he got hold of himself!

It happened while Madame was present. Philip lost his temper. Alice had been flirting with Stephen Berkley. Fielding had been hammering at Philip.

"Why do you keep after *me*?" Philip screamed. "You never say a word to Miss Jensen! And she goes through her lines as—as if she doesn't care what she is saying! And yet she's always saying her speeches just a little too soon or fumbling with something when the lines belong to me! When I was going over my part with Miss Carter it seemed smooth—"

"You and Miss Carter were a couple of wooden figures," said Fielding, "acting out a party charade. This is a play, Henley. It should seem to the audience—if we ever have an audience—like a segment of life."

"But Miss Jensen—"

Fielding smiled at Alice Jensen. And Alice came over to Philip, put her hand carelessly on his shoulder, gave him a soft and melting look out of those blue-green eyes.

"I—I'm sorry!" she said. "Perhaps if we work together—"

"Miss Jensen knows what she's doing," said Fielding. She certainly does, thought Madame.

Madame wasn't surprised when Philip came to see her while she was brewing her cup of tea that afternoon.

"You're just in time," she said. "Tea is only colored water without company."

"I need more than tea," he said. "You saw what's hap-

pening! The play's a mess! Fielding keeps hammering—and Miss Jensen—I say my lines—”

“You say your lines! Jensen doesn’t say hers; she lives them! She *is* the girl in the play, and she won’t really respect you unless you’re the young man.”

“In love with her, you mean? Risking my life—”

“Yes, that’s what the play means! If you can get it the way Jensen gets it—”

“I can do what she can do! Just to show her! To prove—”

“That’s more like it! Put Jensen in her place by proving to her that you know what you’re doing! Then she won’t be able to upstage you and steal your thunder. Show her, show yourself, and Fielding, and the audience, what you are trying to do!”

There she was! Giving the talk she had planned weeks before. She felt the lump in her throat. She had to be careful. If she let her emotions show, young Henley would retreat, thinking her a tiresome, sentimental old girl.

Madame knew this was her great chance—her big role.

“An actor,” said Madame, “must interpret. He’s not a creator. People come to see believable stories, not strutting people. He must immerse himself in the person he portrays. Your own emotion must dominate, but you must lose your emotional identity. You don’t ‘feel’ the part as much as understand the part. Then you blow it up bigger than life. Not overacting—projecting. Good actors are real people, not a bundle of tricks and vocal inflections.”

Philip asked questions, and she tried to concentrate her own experiences into the things she told him. When he left, she threw herself on the worn sofa and cried for the first time in years. She knew her eyes would be swollen and her throat rough. If she could be sure she’d done the right thing! She felt that nothing she had ever done in

the theater was as important. And knew she was being mawkish and silly about it.

"Just an old woman talking to a young boy!" she told herself, daubing at her swollen eyes. "An interfering old woman, who took his girl friend away and introduced him to a scheming tramp who will tear his heart out. And I lost the best escort in the world!"

She went to a delicatessen store, and treated herself to a few slices of turkey and a mixed salad. Dined alone at home. There were two good mysteries on her small television screen.

Madame went to the opening with Jesse Cruthers, a pompous little man who had money in the show. She'd had her hair retouched, and she wore her best dinner gown, recut from a ten-year-old model. People nodded deferentially or stared in awe. That was worth something!

The houselights darkened and the curtain rose, and Madame felt the familiar tightening of her throat. When I stop feeling that, she told herself, I'll be dead—or deserve to be. In a way, she felt that this was as much her opening as if she were playing in it.

Minor characters first. Adequate. Then Alice Jensen and Philip Henley came on. Madame sat very straight and practically stopped breathing.

They were good, *good!* Young people, caught in a web not of their making, and fighting to find themselves, to find one another. They *were* the young people—not just a sly, scheming, ambitious girl and a bewildered young man. Madame didn't need the applause to know she was right. She didn't know if it was the direction, or Alice Jensen, or her own help, or the older Philip Henley projecting himself from the beyond, or the young Philip finding himself.

In the intervals she talked with a dozen people—actors

without jobs, producers who might need her for coaching, climbers who still wanted her recognition.

Lew Marstan gave a party after the play for the cast and those critics he was able to round up, plus the backers and some of his friends, at his penthouse on East Seventy-third Street. There was the usual excitement and flattery. Madame came in for her share of attention. Old stars were constantly being rediscovered these days.

"Your presence makes a party," said Marstan. And then, "All right, don't you think? A solid hit?"

"It went very well," said Madame.

"I told you! I know a good play! And Henley and Jensen got their teeth into it. They've fallen for each other, and that won't hurt the play or the publicity."

"You're so right!" said Madame, and looked at Philip and Alice. Alice was wearing a deceptively simple gown and looking at young Henley with adoration in those odd eyes. Smart girl! She looked at Madame, and Madame thought she winked, but she wasn't sure—her eyes weren't too good.

"I'm leaving," she told Jesse Cruthers. "Don't take me home—the party is still young! The others will be here until the morning reviews come out. I need my beauty sleep."

"Madame never needs that," said Cruthers gallantly.

Philip Henley came up to her as she reached the door. "You're going? Madame, thank you for everything!" His voice was impersonal. Either he'd forgotten the things she'd tried to show him, or he hadn't realized their significance. Or maybe he was really underplaying—a good actor!

"You must drop in to see me," she said, as she had said to everyone.

"I shall be glad to!" His voice was pleasantly insincere—a young man being polite to an old actress who had been

coaching him. And he wasn't winking. She was close enough to be sure.

At home, she undressed slowly. She telephoned Art Ford, her favorite after-midnight disc jockey. He got the theatrical reviews before they reached the streets.

"I was at the opening of 'Tension.' I'm a bit curious as to how it went over. I wonder, my dear Mr. Ford—"

"The play went over very well," he told her. "Here is what John Chapman said—" He read extracts. "And Atkinson was just as laudatory in the *Times*. 'A new star came to Broadway last night—' 'Two young actors of ability and charm in an exciting new play—' 'A rare moment in the theater—' "

Madame got into bed. She was very tired, as if she'd come back from a long journey.

She'd done it! Not just for the memory of Philip Henley. Oh, she'd loved him. But she had loved other men. Some were in the pictures around the room. The memories were a bit faded, elided. They'd been colorful and exciting. She wouldn't have changed even the heartbreak at the end of each affair—so much greater than the pain of losing Horace Chamberlain, though he'd been all she had to lose. Maybe she'd done that for the theater—a sort of final sacrifice.

She knew there were no parts for her in the theater or in Hollywood. Unless there was a miracle, and the theater was full of miracles. Just an occasional coaching job. Lonely evenings. Still, in the theater you never could tell.

They were all gone—the men she had loved—but the theater was still here. And she was still here. A star! A star-maker! She had a curious idea that, there in the darkened room, Philip Henley's tinted face smiled down on her.

GIRLS IN BLACK

THEY TRIED to have lunch together as often as they could, which meant once every two weeks, usually. There were so many things: conferences; dates with clients; business details piling up—which meant a sandwich sent in, instead of a leisurely lunch hour. Career women—and all four of them liked to think of themselves as career women, instead of professional women or girls who “go to business”—have so many things to do besides planning luncheon engagements.

They were eating at the Algonquin. Dorothy had telephoned Eleanor, and she'd said the Algonquin. They all liked the Algonquin. They liked any place that was smart and had good food, and where you saw the right people. All four of them liked seeing—and being seen by—the right people. And the right people, to them, were that layer of sophisticated, brittle, surface-smooth New York which knew what plays to see, what books to read, what clothes to wear, what clichés to say and where to eat.

Dorothy McLaughlin arrived first, which was unusual, because she was nearly always late, always scurrying from one place to another, always talking to people, showing an interest she never felt, planning engagements she had no intention of keeping. Things crowded in on her so. She was early, now, because she had cut a before-luncheon engagement.

What did it matter? The date was with the Acme Bed people, and she was giving them free publicity. She'd have her secretary telephone and get the dull details about their new folding mattress. She wondered if her readers really would be interested in a mattress that went into a closet when it wasn't in use. So few New Yorkers ever had house guests. Visitors, in New York, went to hotels. It wasn't like a small town.

Dorothy remembered the guests in her home, back in Iowa. Cousins and aunts, weeks at a time. In New York, if a visitor stayed half an hour too long you felt aggrieved.

Unless the visitor was Ken Foster. No matter how long Ken stayed . . . That was the trouble—wanting him to stay long, encouraging him to stay, when nothing could come of it, ever.

Dorothy took a seat near the door to the dining room. The headwaiter saw her, came over to her. "Waiting for Miss Beckwith?" he asked, and smiled.

"Yes. She's late."

"She telephoned for a table."

That was nice of Eleanor. All the girls were nice. Girls were so much nicer than men, in New York, as a rule. All the girls she knew helped one another and weren't catty at all. They were fun, much more fun to be with than most men—than all men except Ken.

A girl came in, nodded, went through to the dining room. Dorothy took out her notebook. Made a note of her corsage: white daisies. So simple and so fresh in this not-at-all-simple place. Tomorrow, in her column, she would write, "Yesterday at luncheon I saw a new idea in corsages far more charming and much less expensive than the usual orchid. A bunch of white daisies. Doesn't that bring a home-town-in-spring feeling into a New York winter?"

Dorothy took her column seriously. It was called

"Girl's-Eye View" and ran in the *Morning Star*. It was a sort of shopping column, and by reading it you could learn where to buy everything from needles to white elephants—if you wanted white elephants. The writing was easy, but getting material was not.

It wasn't what she had dreamed of when she came to New York. She had wanted to write plays, then. But the plays didn't write themselves, and being a writer with a by-line on a New York paper wasn't bad. She went to all the openings—commercial and theatrical; to cocktail parties for movie stars; to fashion showings. She knew press agents and headwaiters. She knew everyone on that thin line where commerce and art meet.

She ought to be happy. She knew that. She would be happy if it weren't for Ken Foster. And yet, if it weren't for Ken, she knew she'd be far more miserable. Lonely, too. Lonely in New York, with millions of people to turn to.

Ken was her world. Everything. More important than her work, really. And Ken cared for her—in his way. But Ken was married! And his wife wouldn't divorce him.

Ken always said he thought his wife would give him a divorce. But Dorothy didn't believe him any more. She'd believed him the first three years—years of worry, of nervous tension. Why should his wife give him a divorce? Ken had position, money, charm. His wife had nothing at all! She'd married him when he was young. Home-town stuff. And she hadn't gone ahead as he had.

At least, that's what Ken said. They lived in Westchester, and Ken was always hurrying home. To bridge parties and little dinners, and, in summer, to affairs at the country club. Those times, Dorothy could just shift for herself. And when his wife came to town to the theater, and when he had business engagements.

Other times, those rare other times. Ken was most attentive. But he loathed the parties Dorothy had to

attend. He didn't like any of her friends. And he was getting possessive. She had to do something about it. What could she do? She loved Ken, and she didn't love anyone else.

She didn't want to be Ken's girl, really. She wasn't the girl for a back-street romance. And yet, here she was—and here was Ken!

Well, she'd have to decide. Seeing Ken, which meant when Ken wanted to see her; being Ken's girl. Or not seeing Ken at all. Why, Ken was all she had! Nothing would come of it, ever. Yet...

Susanne Blake and Rita Hammersley came in together. They were older than Dorothy McLaughlin, but just as sleek, just as finished-looking.

"Early bird!" exclaimed Susanne. "What special worm did you expect to catch at the Algonquin?"

"I didn't expect, but sometimes blessings come when you least look for them."

"Such as?"

"There you have me! I'm 'still looking."

"I've been looking for surprises for years," said Rita. "All I ever get each year is a new birthday."

They decided not to wait for Eleanor. She could join them at the table. Together, they went into the dining room to the special place the headwaiter had been holding for them. Very straight. Very slender—that was diet! Very smart—that was career women in New York. They nodded to people they knew. An elderly playwright still living on the fame of a ten-year-old success. An actress who had been waiting that long for a successful play.

Susanne and Dorothy and Rita were in black, as most of the successful women dining at the Algonquin were in black.

Rita was the eldest — and the smartest. And she should have looked smart, for Rita designed clothes for a

wholesale firm. Then the firm sold the clothes she created to the most exclusive little shops—to only one shop in a town. Her clothes weren't spectacular, but they were good. The sort of clothes that made women say, "See, you needn't go to Paris when you can get frocks like this in New York."

Rita had on a gown like that now. It was high in the neck, and the sleeves were long. A series of little tucks radiated from the waist. At her neck was a tiny corsage of colored feathers, and these feathers were echoed in her hat.

She knew that other women were noticing her gown and talking about it, and well they might. It was the one thing she had—her knowledge of clothes.

That was the trouble—it was the only thing she had! Susanne Blake was married. Her husband didn't amount to a great deal, but at least she had him—had someone. Dorothy was having some sort of dreary affair with a married man—Rita hadn't heard the details but little things had come to her. Eleanor always had some man interested in her. But she, Rita, didn't have anyone at all!

She wondered, now, why she was so unpopular, so alone.

She hadn't been popular when she was a child, back in Fairmont. But it hadn't seemed to matter so much, then. For, then, she'd dreamed of New York. She hadn't liked the small town, ever. All her dreams had been of cities, of excitement, of the theater. Well, she had the city and the theater. In a way, she had the excitement, too.

She'd been successful. She knew that. Why, she'd started without any training at all. She and Millie, her sister, hadn't thought of doing anything, actually. Millie never had, so Millie was still back in Fairmont. Millie must be lonely there—all alone in the old house, now that Mama and Papa were dead.

Millie had sort of hinted, in letters, that she'd like to

come to New York to live. But Millie was two years older than Rita, and plainer. Rita alone might get something, some adventure. With Millie, she'd be marked. Two women living together. Two aging women. No one would bother with them at all.

Not that anyone bothered with Rita now. She knew that, but she didn't know why. It had always been that way. Her success hadn't been on a ladder of men, that was certain.

She remembered when she'd come to New York, young and silly and so green. She'd got a job in a department store as a clerk—in the notions. Some of the girls who had started out with her were still there. She hadn't liked notions but she had hung on, living in a hall bedroom and eating in grimy restaurants. She couldn't write home for money; didn't want to give up and go back. So she had kept on.

The few boys she'd met in the store paid no attention to her. She had no opportunity of meeting people outside. She'd tried to flirt a little, but even that had brought no results.

After notions had come blouses, and then dresses. That's when she began to get interested in merchandising. Pretty soon she was making suggestions, and reading, nights, about costumes and color. She began designing gowns and got her chance. In a small shop, first; then in a larger one.

Now, she was one of the biggest designers in the business. She didn't have to worry about *that*. She knew what people ought to wear—and how they ought to wear it. She could look at a woman and know whether her gown was an importation, a good copy, or something run up by a small-town dressmaker.

Each year she knew all the special points of each designer of dresses. And she knew that the other designers

knew *her* designs. She knew also that her fall and spring showings were definitely becoming more important each season.

But that was all she had—her designs. Evenings, she could go to a theater or a movie with some other woman, or turn on the radio or television or read a book at home, alone. She had a charming apartment, very modern, big enough for two. Rita knew that if she met a man she liked she'd marry him and support him, the way Susanne Blake did. Everyone knew Doug Blake didn't pay nearly half of their expenses. But she didn't meet any men she liked—who liked her.

Here, having lunch with the girls, this was fun. Other lunches—business lunches, mostly—would be fun. But everyone else seemed to have things to do evenings. A definite social life. She felt that the fault was undoubtedly within herself, but she hadn't the least idea what to do about it.

She'd tried everything she knew—churches, lectures, charity work. She was too busy, daytimes, to make any great effort at night. If things came of themselves—but nothing came. There were hours at night when she wanted to scream, she was so lonely. And yet she kept on hoping...

The three "girls" ordered their luncheons. Dorothy ordered a clear soup and stuffed pancakes. Rita ordered corned beef and cabbage.

"I haven't had it for ages," she said. "It sounds so back-to-the-farm."

"I'd like to order that but I don't dare," said Susanne Blake. "I'm worried about my figure." So she ordered a chef's salad.

Susanne was worried about her figure, but she was worried more about other things. Curiously enough, Susanne was *not* worried about her husband. She knew that, as far as the world's opinion was concerned, Doug was a

dud. But she didn't care. She knew he drank too much, and she did care about that—only because so much alcohol was bad for Doug. She was sorry he couldn't keep a job only because it would be better for him, psychologically, if he had a job. As a matter of fact, she liked him the way he was. Casual. Careless. Thoughtless. Fun.

Susanne *thought* Doug was in love with her. As far as she knew, he hadn't looked seriously at anyone else since their marriage—and they'd been married ten years.

Susanne knew that the ideal husband supported his wife, didn't get drunk a couple of times a week, didn't sleep late every morning, and wasn't indifferent to manners and courtesies. But she observed a peculiar thing: Successful women in business were not married to successful men!

There were a few exceptions, of course. But in most of those exceptions, the wife had become successful through her husband. The average career woman, smart in her sleek black near-uniform, was either single or married to a man who was almost a parasite

Why was it? Susanne didn't know. Was it because successful men are afraid of brainy women? Or because women who have made good have to have a man who is dependent, weaker?

Doug was weak. She knew that. But Doug was charming. Such good company! It was fun to have someone like him to work for. To know, no matter how hard your day was, that Doug would be waiting at home for you, all ready with plans for the evening: a movie, or the theater; or someone he'd met who'd asked them to drop in for a drink; or maybe just a new book to read.

Susanne had worked hard all her life. She had supported her parents while they were alive. Doug was her reward. He was worth working for.

No, it wasn't about Doug that she was worrying—out-

side of that always-present nibble of fear that she was getting older, too old for Doug, who was younger than she; that Doug would fall in love with someone else, or get bored and go away. Susanne was worrying about her job.

Susanne wrote advertising, and she wrote it well. Until the past year she'd been the best woman copy writer at Bell, Black and Bullerd. Then Bernice Henshaw had joined the organization.

Susanne wasn't afraid of working with a woman, but Miss Henshaw didn't play fair. She was one of the few women Susanne knew who didn't play fair. She'd take Susanne's ideas and twist them around and offer them as her own. In conferences she'd say the things that were based on Susanne's suggestions.

Other things, too, lower than that. Intercepting Susanne's copy before she was supposed to see it, so that her comments would seem even more brilliant; for if you haven't seen the new copy for a campaign and *then* say how it *shouldn't* be—why, that is doubly damning when the copy comes to light with all the faults you've just said would ruin a campaign.

Miss Henshaw did other things, too. She flattered Black, who was the real head of the agency, the way no one else had ever dared flatter him. And worst of all, she hinted ever so delicately that Susanne Blake was getting old, lacked the modern touch. Nothing could be so terrible as *that*, Susanne knew. She wasn't dated! She was keenly alive to modern merchandising methods, to trends, to—to everything!

She didn't know what to do. She could go to Bullerd, who was her friend, and tell him what Miss Henshaw was trying to do. She felt that Bullerd would understand. But

she hated to go to him. She'd never had to do anything like that in business. She hated to start now.

But how could she keep on letting Miss Henshaw get away with things? What if the things were serious that Miss Henshaw was doing to her? What if her job was in jeopardy? Her job and the money for her household—and for Doug! She wished she knew what to do.

The three girls, smooth in their smart black frocks, talked lightly of events of the day as if they were as much at peace inside, as sleek and as unruffled, as their exteriors seemed to indicate.

Eleanor Beckwith arrived at last.

Eleanor, like the other three, was slim and smart in black. But Eleanor had been a beauty. You could tell that, in spite of the faint lavender shadows under her eyes, the lines around her mouth. She looked tired and none too young, now.

But Eleanor was not alone, and the girl with her really was young. Youth personified. Lovely, gay, glowing youth. She was slim, too, but it wasn't the slimness that comes from careful diet. And you knew that the golden glints in her hair were natural; that the color of her cheeks was real.

"I'm sorry I'm late," Eleanor Beckwith said "Just as I was getting ready to go, Miss Sloane came in."

She introduced them all around, as the waiter found an extra chair—the table was set for four. Miss Sloane's full name was Beth Sloane, and she was from Austin, Texas, and she'd been in New York only three months and had a job already in an interior decoration shop. Her aunt was a friend of Eleanor's—they'd met on a cruise—and the aunt had written that Beth was to look Eleanor up.

"My family pictures New York as a sort of dark forest with gunmen lurking behind every tree. They have

terrific ideas of what is going to happen to their darling," she said.

"It's a wonder they'd let you come at all," said Dorothy. She remembered what a hard time she'd had getting away from home.

"What could they do? I finished college. And I certainly didn't want to stay in Texas all my life. So here I am!"

"And the gunmen?" asked Susanne.

"Not a sign of one! As a matter of fact, not nearly enough exciting things happen. Everyone treats me as if I were a baby. How do they know I'm from out of town, I wonder."

The four women in black looked at her. They looked at her as she ordered her luncheon. A heavy soup, meat and potatoes, a glass of milk.

"Don't you know?" asked Rita.

"No, I don't!"

"Well, your clothes, for one thing."

"This suit? Why, it was the smartest thing in Texas! And it was made by a New York manufacturer."

"I know it was," said Rita. And all four went on looking at Beth Sloane.

"There isn't a thing the matter with your suit. It's a very nice suit."

"Then how?"

"She means because it's tweed," said Eleanor. "Tweeds are good, you know, but somehow, that simple felt hat and the tweed suit and the cotton blouse——"

"And I thought I looked soooooo well!" Beth pretended to shudder.

"You do! You look darling! Fresh and fit and unaffected, but *not* New York. Most successful New York women wear black. You wanted to know."

"Oh," said Beth. And then, "Oh, I see."

"Don't change a thing!" said Rita. "You can get away with a lot, the way you are. Keep your eyes open and be 'girl from the country' for a while."

"I think you're terribly smart to have got a job so soon," said Dorothy McLaughlin. "I know girls who have been here for months who can't find a thing."

Beth smiled tolerantly—youthful intolerance trying to be tactful. "They didn't go about it in the right way, I bet. I heard all that about girls not getting jobs and losing jobs and the boss getting fresh. I got a job the second week I was in town. Not as good as I expect to get, but good enough—I can live on it. And my boss is too busy matching off-shades of purple to even think of trying to start anything. I think the boss who tries to start things is something out of fiction, if you ask me."

Eleanor looked at her sharply. The girl couldn't know, of course. And yet—but then, men all over town *were* trying to start things with girls. Her own boss, now.

Eleanor didn't know what to do about it. The job was a good one, and if she didn't have that job she didn't know a single job she could get. And yet her boss did annoy her all the time, in little ways. She didn't like him. It wasn't a temptation. It wasn't that!

There was an alternative. She could go home, back to Council Bluffs. For Eleanor was a man's woman. One of the rare businesswomen that men bother with. Back home, the beau's name was George Hemple. He was on the dull side and he had a shoe store, inherited from his father but a going business. She could go back, marry George, have a house out in the new section. Have babies, even. And belong to the country club.

It would be admitting defeat, in a way. You came to New York to make good. But even so, it would be a pleasant kind of defeat. She was fond of George. She didn't love him, but she wasn't in love with anyone else.

She had been in love a long time ago. There was no one now—no one but Mr. Hargess, pawing over her whenever he got the chance. Back home she'd be a sort of glamour girl, because she'd been to the city. But here she was in the city, and she wanted the city....

Eleanor missed something someone was saying. It was Susanne who asked Beth the next question: "You're glad you came to the city, then?"

"Of course! I'd rather be dead than stay in Texas. In any other place. But you all know—you came from out of town, all of you, I bet."

They all had.

"It's wonderful, isn't it? Being yo—being in New York." She couldn't say "being young" to these women who were getting old. "The theaters and restaurants. I haven't seen many of the shows yet, though a man I met in business took me to see 'The Beautiful Sea.' I think it's wonderful."

She went on and on. All four of the women envied her and only half listened to her. So young, and so unafraid!

Three of the women took black coffee in lieu of dessert. Eleanor took stewed fruit. Beth Sloane, who hadn't met the ogre of approaching fat and middle age, took chocolate soufflé.

They looked around the room, spoke to a new arrival, talked about nothing at all. The theater. Dorothy had seen all the new plays on first nights. Eleanor and Susanne had seen a few of the better things. Rita hadn't seen anything at all.

"I love the theater," said Beth Sloane. "That's one of the reasons I wanted to come to New York. I wanted to go on the stage, at first, but everyone told me what a hard time I'd have, and this other job came along."

Clothes. Rita was information, here, though Dorothy

had been to all the openings and showings, too. Eleanor and Susanne also knew about clothes.

"It's simply wonderful to hear you," Beth said. "To think that you can see a sleeve or a neckline and know who originated it. I guess a dress is just a dress to me, but I know what I like."

"I wish I did," said Rita. "It would make things much simpler."

The other three women in black smiled at her. Their smiles were brittle and sophisticated, but underneath there was something more—a reaching out. Here they were, friends, having lunch together and wanting to talk things over. And they were nonchalant and casual, instead, just as if each of them didn't have a problem she wanted terribly to talk about.

"It's so nice being with you," said Beth Sloane. "It's the first time I've been with a group of real New York women. It makes me feel sort of small town and citified at the same time. You all know all the things I'll have to find out."

"I hope not!" said Rita, and her voice was sharp, though she smiled.

They paid for their own luncheons, the way they always paid. Then they left, all together, saying good-byes at the door. And they planned to meet again—next week if they could, or the week after.

"You'll come again, I hope, Miss Sloane," said Rita. And the other three in black echoed her invitation.

"I'd love to!" said Beth. "Knowing you will probably change my whole life. I'll learn all about New York—the real New York, I mean. You're awfully good to let in a stranger."

Rita took a taxicab to her office. She was late, and she had to see a manufacturer about some special material

that looked like metal. And all the way in the taxicab she thought about the girl from Texas.

The girl was so young and so sure about things. She would never be lonesome—alone. Funny, she had more than Rita had ever had. Rita remembered when she was young and frightened and lonely. Nearly as lonely as she was now. And now she was old!

She looked at herself in the mirror of her compact. Why, the lines were even deeper than she had thought. She remembered the smooth, rounded face of the Texas girl. That was the way girls looked who had glamorous things happen to them.

Rita knew there would never be any of those things for her! There never had been. She had worked, and she had got a reward for working. Success, in a way, during office hours. But nothing outside. This girl would have everything.

Suddenly Rita felt old—older and more alone than she had ever felt. She felt all shriveled under her smart, sleek clothes! No one cared anything about her; no one would ever care! And yet, there was Millie. Millie was alone, too. Maybe the two of them could find happiness—left-over, old-maid happiness.

After all, she wouldn't be alone evenings, if Millie were with her. They could get old—older—together. Millie could look out for things in the daytime; be there when she came home. It was giving up, in a way. And yet, what was she giving up?

Dorothy took a taxicab, too, and rushed away to half a dozen errands. She stopped to look at a new device for a closet that would make it seem twice as large. She remembered when her apartment had been small and her closets so diminutive that she'd needed some such thing.

Now, her apartment was large and full of things people sent her. But her clothes closets weren't full. Just a few smart

dresses she'd got at special discount, and no one to wear them for but Ken.

And thinking now about Ken, she felt suddenly as if Ken were wrong—wrong for her. It was that child who had done it! That fresh-faced girl from Texas with her tweeds and her youth and her sureness. That girl wouldn't get herself into a mess! She was clear-eyed about things.

Why should she, Dorothy, be in a mess? She didn't have as much as the girl. First youth was gone, and ideals—some of them. But she had a job. She could get ahead. Not many girls in town had a signed column.

Ken. That was it. She'd give Ken up. It was the only way, really. She'd be lonely; she'd cry at night from loneliness. But Ken was married and wouldn't get a divorce, ever. He closed the rest of life for her, as if her life were split with a knife. Her column and her life on the paper—and Ken. Now she'd have just the newspaper. Her first love! And maybe sometime she'd meet someone...

Sitting there in the taxicab, she felt hollow inside. As if she'd had a sort of operation—an operation performed by a slim girl in tweeds.

She stopped for cocktails at a Chinese shop that was having an opening, said the right things to the proprietor. She'd say something in her column: "If you want your next cocktail party to be a success, you must have Chinese wafers which have fortunes inside."

Another taxicab ride, and she was in her own apartment, with Annie, the maid, and dinner all ready for her. The soft off-white lamps were lighted in the living room. It was a lovely room, all ivory and apricot and green.

"I'll be ready for dinner in half a minute," she told Annie. "No one's coming in. I'll dine alone. Anyone call?"

"Just Mr. Foster," said Annie.

Just Mr. Foster! And he wouldn't keep on calling after she told him.

She was going to meet a chap named Woods at the theater—*her* tickets; he'd take her for a drink, later. A colorless young man who was a reporter on the paper.

She'd come home, go to bed. Wake up early. Write her column and send it to the office by messenger. Start on her rounds of the shops. Weeks stretched out. Dull weeks. Dead weeks. Without Ken!

The telephone rang. It was Ken. She'd have to tell him! She wasn't young, like that girl, but she knew what was right.

"I can't possibly see you later, Ken," she said. "I didn't know you were going to stay in town." And then—she had to say it. "Ken, I've made up my mind. Really. I'm not . . . I'm not going to see you again . . . any more!"

Eleanor Beckwith told her guest good-bye and hurried to her own office. Though why she should hurry . . . just so she'd be with Hargess that much sooner.

She was there soon enough. A man was waiting for her. He had designs for her to okay. She went over them carefully, making a minor correction, signed her name. That was that.

She was about to call her secretary for some dictation when Hargess came into her office. He talked first about business, standing decently on the other side of the desk. Then he came over to her. A hand slid down her shoulder.

"Don't do that!" she said sharply.

"What's the matter? Have a bad luncheon?"

"No." Her voice rose. "I don't want to be pawed!"

"Keep your voice down! You don't want the girls in the other room to hear."

"I don't care who hears!"

"But I do."

"Well, that's fine!" She stood up. She knew what she

was going to say. Somehow, she had known all along. Ever since young Miss Sloane, whom she'd taken to the luncheon, had been so sure about the men you worked for. Of course! You don't have to take things from men. She didn't. "Well, your whole office can hear this. I'm leaving. This is my resignation. I'll write it if you want me to. I'm going back to my home town. I'm getting married, in case you're interested."

"Married!" said Hargess.

"Yes. You know"—Eleanor's voice was smooth, now—"boy from the home town. Girl makes good in the city, and career turns to ashes, and she longs for a home and family of her own."

Susanne Blake was working on a toothpaste account. The layout had arrived for it when she got back to her office. It really was *very* effective, she thought. A little imp, sitting on top of a tube of toothpaste, was instructing three little girls as to how to brush their teeth. The copy was good, too. Susanne had the approval of a whole committee of dentists—that had been her idea, too. She wondered what Miss Henshaw would say to *that*!

And something funny happened. Instead of Miss Henshaw's face, Susanne envisioned a younger, prettier person—the girl who'd been at luncheon with them. Beth Sloane. Why, that girl wouldn't let anyone like Miss Henshaw interfere with her happiness. She wouldn't carry tales, that girl! She'd throw back her head and be brave and see it through.

Susanne knew it wasn't as if her job were threatened, really. She'd been here longer than Miss Henshaw had. Henshaw had changed jobs five times in three years. What was there to worry about?

It was as if, suddenly, a load had disappeared. Why, there wasn't *anything* to worry about. She had everything:

her home and her job—and Doug! She could take care of Miss Henshaw, give her as good as she gave. Nothing to worry about except the always-present nibble of fear—fear that someday Doug would be able to get along without her.

It was three weeks before the girls met again. They chose the Warwick, this time. The Raleigh Room. It was an attractive room, and the food was good.

There were five of them again, but not the same five. Eleanor Beckwith had gone back to Council Bluffs! To marry her boyhood sweetheart, George Hemple. She'd gone the week before.

"Just think," said Dorothy, "she said she made up her mind the day we had luncheon at the Algonquin. Isn't that amazing?" She stopped, for she had made up her mind about things that day, too. Funny! Something about that day!

She stuck to her promise, too. It had been even harder than she had anticipated. She'd cried herself to sleep every night. And she had been tempted to telephone Ken. But she hadn't telephoned.

The worst was over now. At least, she hoped so. After all, she had her work. That kept her busy. And it was important, too. And she might meet someone . . .

"That's funny," said Rita. "For that was the day I wrote to my sister to join me here." She smiled at the fifth member of the group—a sallow, slightly older replica of herself. Millie smiled, too.

"I was so amazed when I got Rita's letter. I thought it would be weeks before I could get here. But the very next day some new people in town wanted the house. So I just left everything and came right to New York."

"I bet Rita was glad to have you," said Susanne.

"You'll never know!" said Rita.

She meant it. Funny that she hadn't insisted on Millie's coming before. It was wonderful; almost as wonderful as having a husband, as being married. Why, with Millie here, she belonged to someone. They were a family, the two of them. A woman alone at night is a pitiful sight. A woman alone in a restaurant always looks out of place, forlorn. But two women—that's different

Rita had shown her sister the city—the Empire State Building, Radio City, the smart shops. They'd already seen some of the best things in the theater—plays Rita hadn't gone to because she didn't want to go alone. Millie was wearing one of Rita's newest gowns. Plain and smart and black. Why, already Millie looked as if she'd always lived in New York.

There was nothing else for Rita. She knew that. There wasn't any man in sight—never had been. Rita had her job and her sister—someone to talk to after business hours. It made life worth while.

Susanne didn't realize that she had made a decision. Not being afraid of Miss Henshaw seemed so natural, now, as if she'd never really been afraid of her. Why, already the men in the office were getting wise to Miss Henshaw, laughing at her most erudite remarks.

Susanne shuddered to think what would have happened if she'd gone to Mr. Bullerd with tales about Miss Henshaw. The fear of Miss Henshaw was gone. Her job was safe. Doug was safe—for a while. But what if someday Doug . . . The little fear about Doug still nibbled, but just now even that was vague. It was good, being alive and having a job—and Doug.

Well, she couldn't sit here mooning. And that new girl Eleanor had brought, originally, certainly would feel out of things if someone didn't talk to her.

"How do you like New York by this time?" Susanne asked Beth Sloane.

"I still think it's wonderful," said Beth. "I changed jobs since I first met you."

"You did?"

"Uh-huh. I got sick of that decorator who never thought of anything but color. I'm a receptionist now. No future there, but I can always change. I like it, though. You see—" She hesitated.

"What?" asked Dorothy curiously.

"Remember, I was so sure that the boss never tried to start anything? 'Only fiction,' I said. Well, I'm learning."

"You mean *your* boss?" asked Rita.

"Yes. Gets fresh! But I can keep him in his place. He's a married man, too."

"Married?" said Susanne.

"Don't be so shocked! Yes, he is married. Wife and family in Great Neck. His wife bores him terribly. It's a line, of course, but I've seen the wife, so it isn't all line. She's fat and silly! He's really a lamb. Good-looking, too. Oh, you needn't warn me! I'm being—careful. When you're young, you know what you're doing. It's only when you get older that you get involved emotionally, they tell me."

"Of course," said Susanne, "only——"

"I know! I'll watch my step. But it's fun. The office is fun, too, though the telephone girl tried to put a lot over on me. Wanted me to watch *her* switchboard for two hours at lunch and distribute the mail which her friend, the office boy, ought to do. So I told the boss."

"You're wonderful!" said Susanne. "Anything else?"

"Nothing else in the office. A lot of things in letters from home. You know how that is."

"How is it?" asked Susanne.

"Well, my sister wanted to come here, but I told her no. I don't want anyone hanging around my neck and

writing letters back home about every little thing. And my boy friend at home, who hoped I wouldn't get a job and would have to come back, has been raising Cain. Wants me to come home and marry him."

"You wouldn't do that?" Rita asked.

"Me? I should say not! I'm just getting started. This town is full of the best-looking men—my boss isn't so hard to look at, if it comes to that!—and I should go home to a boy I could have had in the beginning! I should say not!"

"I'm glad everything's going so well," said Dorothy. "If—if there's any advice we can give you——"

"I'll sure come to you if there is," said Beth Sloane. "I know you all know a lot about the city. But I bet you've all got into the habit of not saying everything you think. I've got to talk straight out! Not that you haven't helped me," she added hastily. "You have! Just being with you. And about clothes. You haven't said a thing about me!"

They hadn't said a thing about her! And there she was—all in black from her smart little hat to the tips of her just-then-invisible shoes.

"You spoke about wearing black. Successful women—girls in black. Remember? So I took it right to heart. I feel, now, that I'm like the rest of you. Smart. A real New York girl."

THE BRONZES OF MARTEL GREER

FIRST OF ALL, I must tell you that I do not believe Leora Prichard's story. So I see no way of convincing you that it is true. It couldn't be. And yet . . .

Those people are gone. At least, there has never been any trace of them. Martel Greer is gone. There remain only the tiny, inert, sentimental bronzes—and Leora Prichard, weeping on any convenient shoulder in any convenient bar.

Leora Prichard will tell you her story if you'll give her enough drinks to make her articulate. Without the drinks, she is just any girl whom you might meet about town; a girl who, until yesterday, undoubtedly was beautiful. There are still traces of that beauty in the curve of her cheek, in her clear, cool profile. Her body is too sharp in outline. It has a brittle, fragile look that once was youth and loveliness; that might have softened into a fine maturity, had it not been for drink—and Martel Greer.

Leora says she drinks to forget Martel Greer. That may be, but she does not forget. She sits at a table in a shadowy bar, and when you—and alcohol—produce the right mood, she tells the story that cannot possibly be true.

In an occult tale of the East, it could be woven with the glamour of the supernatural. With its horror uncloaked

by mysticism or beauty, Leora Prichard tells not of an alien thing out of the past, but of the reason for her excesses.

"It's too bad she's gone to pieces. She was such a pretty girl," her acquaintances say, and they accept her story as a bit of the mosaic of New York. I cannot believe it, yet Harriet Demarest and Norman Perker and Martel Greer and the others are gone—and those figurines remain as Martel Greer's very substantial contribution to the art of America.

Perhaps in my mind I join too significantly with Martel Greer those who disappeared. Certainly the police investigations absolved him of all responsibility.

Martel Greer's disappearance was of more importance. After all, he was a real figure in the art world. Yet when he went away, there was only Leora Prichard's ridiculous story.

Probably he went abroad and joined one of the art colonies or armies that undoubtedly would have welcomed him. Or, as we had no word of him in Europe, perhaps he discovered a faraway island and is even now doing exquisite figurines of lovely native girls. Perhaps tomorrow he will be back, to make us feel uncomfortable because we have even listened to Leora's story.

It was a good ten years ago that people became aware of Martel Greer. And as they became aware of him, they became aware of his background.

He was handsome. Even those who didn't like him had to admit that. He was near that desirable six-foot mark, lean enough to look artistic, with dark brown hair which he wore only a trifle longer than most men.

Greer had come from a midwestern family. His father had been a doctor, or was it a chemist? No one was sure. Anyhow, Greer had studied medicine in college and had specialized in chemistry until more artistic pursuits claimed

him. He always dabbled in chemistry a bit; though as he grew more successful, his laboratory was used mostly for the casting of his statuettes. He always made the first casts himself, taking great pleasure in it.

Perhaps these figurines should have been stressed before. They are important—perhaps more important than Martel Greer. There are hundreds of replicas of them in homes and shops and collections all over America.

Martel Greer went to a good art school when he left his midwestern university. He was no self-made artist. He was not even a modern. He shuddered at primitives. He brought to the people their ideal of beauty. His sentimental figures peeved the critics, but they brought more money to Greer than if he had done spheres and cubes mashed together and smooth-faced ladies with one eye, or rough gargoyles of men.

He always made preliminary drawings. Rather stupid drawings. Critics had to admit that his finished work was amazingly better. Then he did his figurine in clay. Finally, in his own casting furnace, he cast his "master bronze." Then he cast several "key" bronzes, from which were cast the replicas that sold for such high prices.

Greer was odd about his originals. He kept these "master bronzes" in a glassed cabinet under lock and key. You could admire whenever you liked, but under no circumstance could you finger these originals. Greer always produced, gladly, a replica of the very bronze you wanted to see. He kept a reserve stock of them in a storeroom back of the laboratory, ready to be shipped to art dealers. He was an excellent businessman.

Most of the bronzes were about four inches high, though "Child with a Book" is no more than three. And "End of Day"—the laborer standing half asleep, his dinner pail in his hand—is nearer five inches.

But don't gather that Greer specialized in children and

workingmen. His money and fame came from figurines like "Butterfly Girl," that exquisite statuette of a girl on tiptoe who has seemingly just caught a butterfly, and "Windsprite," the girl with wild hair running against the wind.

Greer's first figures in miniature were unsuccessful, crude and awkward. Absolutely without beauty or charm.

Before he began to make money from his art, Greer supported himself by doing chemical analyses. When he lectured, as he frequently did, to ambitious young artists, he would smile ruefully over those dismal years.

"I wouldn't be a success today," he would say, "had I spurned humble ways of earning a living. Whether you dig ditches or sell books or analyze cold cream, if it's your way of taking a step toward success, it's worthy of you."

In spite of hard work, those first figurines were dreadful. So were other things Greer attempted. He painted huge canvases, following both the academic and the modern schools. He declared that modern art was a trick and needed neither technique nor emotion.

"With time, paint and bad drawing, I can turn out a painting as good as the best moderns," he used to say. Yet his own modern things brought him neither money nor acclaim.

It was after he met Harriet Demarest that he attained real success. He admitted that his first good figurine, "Welcome," was inspired by her lovely body.

To be sure, the original sketches seemed as amateurish as anything he had ever done. Friends who happened in while he was doing the first modeling thought they had never seen more stupid clay.

For weeks Greer worked over the tiny model of "Welcome." Harriet Demarest on the model throne kept her difficult pose. The statuette seemed lifeless, dull. Only

Greer seemed different. Curiously different. He worked harder. Seemed more nervous. His friends put it down to artistic temperament.

Suddenly Greer became too busy to see his friends. He said he needed a couple of weeks alone with his model. People distracted him. And then the fresh and charming "Welcome" was finished!

"He owes a lot to that beautiful girl," Billy Drust said, when "Welcome" became a success. "I thought from the way they both acted that there was romance there. She certainly brought out a lot in him."

It was odd, Harriet Demarest's going away as soon as the figurine was done. Freddie Harper, I think, was the last to see her. And that was before Greer "went into the silence," a method so successful he continued to follow it.

"She was looking tired," Harper said. "It was a difficult pose. Greer mixed her a pick-me-up—a sort of tea, I believe he said—in his laboratory. She said it refreshed her. She kept her pose perfectly, then, but I was almost frightened to see how expressionless she looked. After she stopped posing she complained of feeling stiff in the joints. I didn't wonder. It was hard to hold that pose such a long time. She was quite herself again before I left, and I felt better about it later, when I saw the charming finished product."

"Welcome" was a lovely bit of work. It was warm, alert. Scarcely four inches high, the delicate bronze had a beauty that only a lovely girl like Harriet could inspire. The sleek surface of the bronze reproduced, in miniature, her smooth young flesh. Every curve of the supple body was there, seemingly soft and pliant. The original, dark and gleaming, was the first jewel to be placed in Greer's cabinet—that cabinet that was to house so many tiny dark jewels.

Greer himself realized the miracle of going from awkward, almost childish work to this glowing piece. "Up to now, my work has been experimental," he said. "I had to

wait, and learn, till I could do the sort of thing I always had in mind."

Even the critics who called Greer's figurines "three-dimensional photography" and "no better than snapshots done as miniature bronzes" had to admit that in spite of—or perhaps because of—"Welcome's" fidelity to nature, it possessed some virtue. What if it were sentimental? If critics preferred gnarled old men and obese grotesqueries of women, the public wanted glowing, slender youth. "Welcome" sold for excellent prices.

People were surprised when Harriet Demarest did not pose for Greer again. He himself expressed the greatest disappointment, though he explained that there never had been any sentimental attachment there. Often, between an artist and his model there is a camaraderie that passes for sentimentality. You couldn't help being fond of a girl like Harriet Demarest if you looked hours at a time at her lovely body, Greer said.

"I do miss her," he told everyone. "In a way, my success came through her. Her old beau from Iowa arrived in New York and persuaded her to go back home."

We didn't see Harriet Demarest again, but that was natural. If all the gods can provide, as a career in the city, is posing in studios that are usually too hot or too cold, no wonder Harriet decided to go home. And yet there is Leora's story!

I don't know who modeled for "The Secret." It doesn't matter. There were the same dull sketches; the same awkward clay; weeks when Greer was too busy to see anyone—and then the full perfection of that second bronze, a shy girl, smiling over some secret memory.

The next piece, I believe, was "Dancer at Dawn." Greer said that the model of "The Secret" had gone back to stenography, from which she had emerged just long enough to gain immortality. "I'm using a new model for

each figurine," he said. "Variety is one of the things I'm after. Each girl has a new rhythm. Now, this girl is graceful, flowing. A girl born to dance!"

She was, indeed. She will dance always in Greer's lovely bronze.

The figurines continued. Greer became an important man. He moved from the rickety building which had been his office and laboratory and home to a charmingly remodeled old house. There was a gracious studio, high-ceilinged, with great north windows. On the gray walls were Greer's preliminary sketches and some excellent originals he had picked up. Against the walls were deep seats covered in smoke-colored velvet, and the long curtains were brocaded in chartreuse and flame. A sofa of gray and flame faced the fireplace. And in one corner was the always-locked cabinet of originals.

There was a model's dressing room off the studio. And there were living quarters, too. A bedroom done in black lacquer and crimson. A good kitchen. A closet for wines. And a really fine laboratory, in which was the small but perfect casting furnace.

"I might as well keep my hand in," he laughed when he showed people the laboratory. "You can't tell when the muse will desert me, and I'll have to go back to chemistry for a living."

The curious events, in spite of Leora Prichard's story, are, I feel sure, entirely coincidental. Couldn't it be possible that people who had modeled for Greer should disappear afterwards and that he was in no way responsible?

Harriet Demarest went home. Greer had told us about her, and later about his decision never to use a model for more than one figurine. He couldn't see why he should keep track of discharged models. No one ever questioned him about Harriet or her immediate successors.

It was only when Lucia Bagley disappeared that the police began to annoy him. Lucia Bagley had come to New York from Georgia, hoping to go on the stage. When she couldn't get on, she had worked as a model; had been working for some time when she posed for Greer. When she no longer wrote home, her parents grew worried, asked for an investigation. The police could find no trace of her after she left Greer's employ.

Greer's story, told with such sincerity that the police were forced to accept it, was that Miss Bagley had indeed posed for him for several weeks. He showed the preliminary sketches he had made. He pointed to the gleaming original in the cabinet, handed a replica to the police.

"I finished on a Wednesday," said Martel Greer. "I paid her for the whole week. I was sorry to lose her, but I use a model only once, you know. My public is used to variety in my figures. Miss Bagley was a fine type, self-reliant, intelligent. She did not tell me her plans. If there's anything I can do for you, gentlemen?"

There was nothing he could do. The police had found no trace of the girl after she left Greer's studio. They made a perfunctory search of the place, stood in awe while Greer explained the laboratory, the tiny casting furnace. There was nothing for them there, certainly.

A few months later Norman Perker disappeared. Perker, it seemed, had been selling hardware and had lost his job. And Greer needed a male model. He had had a great success with "Adonis Moderne." Perker had represented himself as single, as indeed he was. It was not until the police, searching for Perker because of the insistence of a Miss Blessington, came to Greer's studio that he learned of Perker's love affair. "But this is getting to be annoying," Greer said. "I really can't be responsible for my models after they leave me. Perker didn't tell me anything about his affairs. Perhaps, having no job and fearful of respon-

sibility for the young woman, he went away to get a fresh start."

Again the representatives of the law examined Greer's statuettes; they examined his studio and laboratory with even greater interest and drank some of his liquor with the greatest interest of all.

Greer continued to work. The cabinet of originals was nearly full of lovely figurines. The replicas grew in popularity. Even the critics who called Greer sentimental were forced to consider him seriously. Every collection in America held a Greer bronze.

Then came the other disappearances! There is no need to go into detail. Greer described it as a series of bad luck. It was that, surely. Through some trick of fate, his models seemed to disappear forever as soon as he was through with them! Greer admitted he never heard of them again. Why should he? He picked them up in shops, through agencies, on the streets. And they seemed to disappear, as if by magic, as they left his studio! A friend or a relative would urge the police to make a search—and the search would lead to Greer!

Greer admitted that the thing was getting on his nerves. His friends noticed how worn he looked. He was still graceful, well-groomed. But there were times when he was not himself; when he hardly seemed to hear what anyone was saying.

Certainly the police did not help him. They came to his studio in groups and singly. They searched everything minutely. They poked into the laboratory: monkeyed with the miniature casting furnace. Only its size kept them from being suspicious of it. Greer had to let them see it in action; had to explain over and over again that it was made only for casting of four-inch bronze figurines. They even questioned the models who were posing for him.

One time Greer was so annoyed that he dismissed a

model before he had finished the statuette of her. The bit of clay was still awkward and lifeless and dull. She and the detective had talked hours on end, so Greer could not get any work done. He explained that she seemed so much more absorbed in the detective than in her posing that he had to let her go.

"I've been keeping track of Miss Burke," the detective reported to him later. "She's posing for a magazine artist."

"I'm glad she's working," said Greer.

"So am I," said the detective. "We're going to get married. Never saw her until I met her up here. Well, I quizzed her enough; asked her if she saw any monkey business around and she said no, that outside of giving her tea to drink—which ain't never hurt no good girl—and making her pose till she felt stiff as a ramrod, you was a perfect gentleman. And she ain't disappeared yet!"

"Good luck to you, and I hope she won't," laughed Greer. He was glad when the police finally ceased to annoy him.

It was just after this that Leora Prichard came to model for Martel Greer. He met her in a Village tearoom. She was crying because she had lost her job.

Greer spoke to her. Leora told him how she had come East from San Antonio, Texas, three years before. Her parents were dead, and she was an only child. She was twenty-three. Until she was twenty, life in Texas had been peaceful. She had gone to a southern girls' college and had worked for a year on a local newspaper. Her mother had died and she had come to New York.

She hadn't been able to get work on a newspaper or to sell the things she wrote. She might have returned to Texas, but by that time her father had died, too. He left enough money so that for a while she lived comfortably. Then she had a couple of disastrous love affairs, which

left her emotionally scarred and considerably poorer. Now her money was gone.

"I've got just the work for you," Greer said. "Posing. It's easy. You'll like it. I work slowly, and I may need you a whole month. I do figurines, only a few inches high. You wouldn't think they'd take that long, but there's a lot of detail."

He paid for her dinner, took her up to his studio. She was impressed by the high vaulted ceiling, the gray picture-covered walls. Greer gave her wine, showed her the figurines, let her hold a tiny replica in her hand.

"It's heavier than you'd think," she said.

"Of course it is," he smiled. "It's bronze, you know. Solid bronze. I cast these myself. I'll show you my casting furnace."

Leora spent a wonderful evening. Of course Greer made love to her, and she admits she fell in love with him. She hadn't had anyone to love for months.

That was on a Thursday. Greer made her take an advance in salary; told her he paid better than most artists because the work was so exacting. "You'll have to stand very still," he said.

She started posing for him on Monday. It was a difficult pose: hands stretched out, head back, begging from life the privilege of living. "Suppliant," Greer said he would call it.

He finished the preliminary sketches, started working in clay. Leora grew tired. He let her rest, made her pose again.

"It was odd," Leora said. "because all he seemed to care about was that I hold the pose for one hour without moving. He said I had to do that to 'set the pose.'"

At the beginning of the second week he gave her something to drink.

"It was pleasant and warming," said Leora. "A sort of spicy tea. It made me feel a little numb, but not awfully

sleepy or drugged. I could keep the pose better, then. But when I got through posing, after I'd had the tea, I felt stiff all over. It was from standing so still, he told me.

"He didn't seem to be getting along very fast. He made a clay model but it wasn't good, like the finished things. He said he couldn't go on with the work seriously until I learned to hold the pose. Even with the tea, it was hard to keep absolutely still for an hour at a time. I got better about the middle of the week."

Greer continued to make love to her. Leora admitted she liked that. She'd felt lost for months; had had no one she cared about. Now it was pleasant, having dinner each evening with Greer and, after the cook left, drinking his wine, being held in his arms on the big couch in front of the fireplace.

He still complained about her modeling. "This is how you should pose," he said. He took her to the cabinet, pointed to one of the figurines. "That's the first good thing I ever did," he said. "I had a charming model. Her name was Harriet Demarest. A lovely girl."

Leora grew jealous. Not of the figurine, of course, but of the girl who had posed for it. "Let me see it!" she begged.

"No," said Greer. "The case is locked. I never let anyone fool with my originals. These are the first ones I cast. I keep them as models for future castings. If you're good, when I've finished the model of you, I'll give you one of yourself—and one of this figure, too. If only you could pose like that! Careless, happy, free!"

The next day he gave her more of the warm, spicy tea. Timed her pose.

"Forty minutes, and you moved," he said. "Well, that's a little better. It's important to hold the pose for a full hour."

Leora was so stiff she had to rub her knees and her elbows. It seemed silly to her that the exact time should

matter. Still, Greer said it did, and he was a great sculptor. She tried hard.

In the middle of the third week Leora thought the clay miniature Greer was making of her looked just as it had the first day he worked on it.

"Tomorrow I'll work in earnest," he said. "You did very well today. For an hour you didn't move at all. That means you can do it tomorrow, too. I'll make the tea a little stronger. That will help you. Then, if you can hold the pose for a full hour, I'll give you something else to drink. It will have a funny flavor, but you won't mind it after the first sip. You must drink it as quickly as you can and start posing immediately afterwards. You won't forget what I've told you?"

"I won't forget," Leora promised.

He seemed jubilant because she had held the pose, though seemingly he had done no work at all. Maybe men were all as unreasonable as that, Leora thought. Well, if it made him happy . . .

As she had done every night since she had started to pose for him, she had dinner with him. It was a good dinner. After the cook left, Greer gave Leora some wine and held her in his arms on the couch in front of the fireplace. Then: "You must run along now," he said. "I've got some casting to do."

"Can't I help?" she begged.

"Not tonight, baby. Perhaps tomorrow night. Get some beauty sleep. I want you to look especially lovely tomorrow. Now you've learned how to pose, I want to do the best work I've ever done."

She was tired. Her pose was a trying one. The tea and the wine and the fire and Greer's arms . . .

She went into the model's dressing room to put on her hat and coat. She must have come out quietly because Greer did not look up as she stood in the doorway. He

opened a drawer in a carved chest of drawers; felt for something in the back of the drawer. Then, going to the cabinet, he put the key into the lock.

So that was where he kept the key! Well, someday when he was out she'd open the cabinet, examine the statuette that was so much lovelier than she!

She wouldn't let him see that she had been watching him when he got the key! She went back into the dressing room quietly, came out again, this time closing the door noisily behind her. Greer was walking away from the cabinet.

"Good-bye, dear," he said, kissing her. "I'll see you in the morning."

The next morning Greer greeted her in his usual professional manner. He never became affectionate until the hours of posing were over.

"I'll fix the tea for you, and you can take the pose right away," she said. "Then I'll get the other drink ready." He went into the laboratory..

The telephone rang.

Greer was annoyed, but he answered the telephone. His annoyance increased.

"I must run away this minute," he told Leora. "I'll be back in half an hour; you might be getting ready to pose while I'm gone."

Leora went into the dressing room, took off her clothes. She threw a dressing gown around her shoulders, went back into the studio. She picked up a magazine, tried to read, but she was too restless to concentrate on the printed word.

Then she remembered the key. Why not? She'd have time to see what the figure was really like before Greer returned.

She found the key easily, went to the cabinet, unlocked

the door. She knew the figure, of course. She lifted it out.

It felt peculiar. So much lighter than the other figurines she had held in her hand. Odd!

Without thinking, she locked the case, took out the key. She carried the figurine over to the long north windows so she could examine it more carefully.

What a lovely thing it was! Greer was right. She was hard, rigid, compared with this lovely, flowing body. Had he loved the girl who had posed for this?

She heard Greer's step on the stairs. Frightened, she rushed into the dressing room, the figurine in her hand. If only he wouldn't notice that it was out of the cabinet. He would be so angry with her!

"Hello!" he called. Luckily, he hardly ever came into the dressing room.

"I've been reading. Ready in a minute."

"Take all the time you want," he said.

Thank heaven, he was in a good humor! She heard him walk toward the laboratory.

She put the figurine on the dressing table. Nervously she threw off the dressing gown. By accident the sleeve of the gown brushed the figurine off the table.

The little bronze hit the floor with a peculiar cracking sound. Funny! Greer had said the figures were of solid bronze. She reached down to pick up the figurine.

Now, when Leora Prichard tells the story she says that even before she touched the figurine she felt what she was going to discover.

She picked up the figurine. The jar had cracked it, indeed! It lay now in two pieces in her hand. She looked at it—and it was not of solid bronze, after all!

Under a thin layer of bronze was something unspeakable. Hideous. The tiny broken thing in her hand was not a bronze replica of Harriet Demarest. It was, by some strange chemistry, some horrible decrescence, what once

must have been the lovely, graceful body of Harriet Demarest herself!

Leora closed her eyes. She wanted to shriek. It couldn't be true! Couldn't be! Yet there it was—in her hand!

Carefully she put down the terrible broken thing. Trembling, she struggled into her clothes. If—if she could only get out! If only . . .

Greer stood in the doorway of the laboratory. "What's the matter?" he asked. "I thought you were undressing!" His voice was sharp.

"I'm—I'm ill," she managed to say. "I'll be back—after a while." As if she feared he was going to reach out after her, she flew down the stairs.

Leora told her story to everyone who would listen, but people could not believe such a horrible, absurd tale.

The police decided to investigate. It was ridiculous, of course. Even in modern chemistry, there is no connection with magic. Still, they wouldn't have believed in the radio or television only a few years ago. They'd open one of those precious statuettes!

Greer was not in his studio when the police arrived. Feeling a trifle silly, they broke in the door. The place looked exactly as it had looked before. The studio of a successful sculptor. On the walls were the same bad sketches, the same valuable originals. The laboratory looked shiningly efficient, the kitchen gleamingly neat. The casting furnace was cold. In the dressing room, the dressing gown hung on its accustomed hook. There were no broken pieces of a figurine!

The cabinet was locked, as always. And, as always, it was full of charming bronzes. The police forced open the door.

The figurines were obviously of solid bronze, just as Martel Greer had always said! They resisted all hammer

blows. They did not crack when they were dropped on the floor. Of course, Greer could have taken out the originals, substituted the replicas. It all seemed too absurd. Well, when he came back...

Martel Greer has not returned. Still, if an artist wants to take his money out of the bank, give up his studio and travel, there's no reason why he need tell anyone about his plans. Certainly the police did not find the slightest evidence of any crime.

The police and the newspapers still expect Martel Greer to return. Their investigations have been perfunctory, careless, fruitless. There seems no reason to do anything; nor is there, if it comes to that, anything definite for them to do. As for the hysterical story of a girl who is obviously going to pieces, I told you in the beginning that I didn't believe it.

DEAR SISTER SADIE

August 4

DEAR Sister Sadie:

Your ever welcome letter here Friday evening when I came home to dinner and was pleased to learn you and your family are well, same I can thank God say for my darling wife, family and self.

Saturday night Hannah and self played bridge with 3 married couples. We play for a 20th of a cent a point but what I won I had to make good for my darling wife. I always tell her that it don't, help me to win when she always loses, but God bless her, she loves to play cards and it is a harmless pastime so I only tease her about her losses, which I gladly make good for her.

Sylvia and Walter are both well. It is really about Sylvia I want to write you about. She is twenty-six years old, and while these days twenty-six years old is not old for a modern girl, like when you was young, Sadie, and did not get married until you was twenty-eight and had us worried for fear you would be on our hands but you fooled us, Sadie, Ha Ha! I would feel more satisfied if Sylvia was married.

You know she is a lovely girl, being raised so carefully by us and never being out late the way some girls are, which is a shame and a disgrace. Never has she done one thing or hardly one thing of which we can be ashamed, also she

can play the piano and cook, which most modern girls cannot do. Hardly a day passes when she does not in some way help Hannah in the kitchen with the cooking and while I would rather eat Hannah's cooking, for I consider Hannah the best cook in the world, though you and Ma always cooked to suit me when I was at home.

What I would like to say, Sadie, is that if you know of a nice young man who wants to marry a fine girl, maybe you could have him come to see us, if he gets in this city or if not Sylvia could come to visit you. Not that Sylvia is not popular for night after night some young man comes here for dinner and they go to the pictures afterwards but they are not marrying men, Sadie. These days it is hard to find a marrying man. If I could find a good man for Sylvia I would take him in the business with me or if he had a business of his own—(which I would prefer for then Walter could go in business with me, which is what I plan and the business is not big enough for more than two, though Walter does not seem to want to settle down)—I would give him gladly 1 or 2 thousand dollars for a business of his own.

If you want to write me about this, Sadie, write on a separate piece of paper and send it to the office for Hannah opens all my mail and she would not like it if she knew I was asking you a thing like this. Hannah wants Sylvia to get married as much as I do but she would not like it for me to ask you, even if you are my sister. She knows there is no one like Sylvia, who is a fine lovely, sweet girl but she would rather Sylvia would get a man by herself. But take my word for it, Sadie, these men Sylvia knows are not marrying men and when they are marrying men they seem to pick out some other girl.

Several years ago Sylvia was interested in a fellow named Terry Wells, who was no good. He was a mechanic in a service station which is no position for a young man

who goes with a girl like Sylvia and he had other faults. I told her he was no good from the start but she kept on seeing him until I had to put my foot down hard and make her stop seeing him. Finally her brother, Walter, had to go and tell him things would be too hot for him if he didn't keep away from Sylvia.

Sylvia has not been interested in anyone since that time. Luckily this Terry Wells left town so he has not bothered Sylvia since then and I know there was nothing between them but you know how young people are.

We are all well. Sylvia and Walter went to the show at the Casino last night. I like to see a boy take his sister out though Walter does not go with his sister much for he has other girls on the brain. He likes a girl named Wanda Merritt, who would run after him if he gave her any encouragement but I always say that it is easy enough for a man to get anybody he wants and there is no use of him running too much after Wanda Merritt until his sister is married, for he is only 24 years old and has not even gone into business, though lately he comes into the store nearly every day.

Love from all to your family and yourself,
Your ever loving brother,
Fred.

October 8

Dear Sister Sadie:

I am writing you this at the office because it is about the matter I wrote you about some time ago. I will write you another letter at home so Hannah won't suspect I am writing to you here as it would hurt her feelings and she does not like me to hurt her feelings.

It is about Sylvia. Another of her friends was married last week and now she is practically the only girl left in her crowd and I am sure she is beginning to feel bad when

she sees the nice homes and families her friends have.

I know your daughters are married but they had opportunities of meeting young men that Sylvia never had and there never was a finer girl, Sadie, than Sylvia. Never a harsh word to anyone unless she is fooling with her brother and answering him the way brother and sister do. And outside of once thinking she liked a garage mechanic named Wells, which did not amount to anything, Sadie, she has never done anything except of which a father could be proud and that was nothing and was a year or two ago and forgotten by everyone.

I would give a nice young man 2 to 3 thousand dollars for his business, if he was in business or give him that much or maybe a little more for a home, for all I have saved, Sadie, is for my dear ones, who I would like to see happy.

Write me here at the store if you know of anyone who would like to meet a fine nice girl like Sylvia.

Love from all to you and your family, in haste,

Your ever loving brother,

Fred.

November 29

Dear Sister Sadie:

Your ever welcome letter received last Tuesday and am pleased to know you and your family are well, the same I can say of my darling wife, son and daughter.

The turkey came Wednesday for which we all thank you. We had a good Thanksgiving dinner which Hannah, with Sylvia to help her, cooked in her usual fine way.

A few days after your letter came, Sadie, in which you said a friend of yours, a Mr. Herbert Fidler, would telephone us because he was in our city and wanted to meet some young people, the telephone rang and it was Mr. Fidler. Sylvia happened to be home and answered the telephone. As he was your friend Hannah suggested that

Sylvia ask Mr. Fidler to dinner for the meals at even the best hotel here, the Wilson House, are none too good.

Well, Hannah and Sylvia cooked a fine dinner and as you know, yourself, Hannah is a wonderful cook and in a few years, if she has a home of her own, Sylvia would be just as good a cook as her mother, if she had a nice young man to cook for.

Hannah was still in the kitchen when Mr. Fidler came but Sylvia had put another dress on and was waiting in the living room.

Mr. Fidler, as I need not tell you, Sadie, is a fine young man. He spoke very nice of you folks. He brought Sylvia a fine box of candy and after dinner her and Walter and Mr. Fidler and Walter's girl friend, Wanda Merritt, went to the Palace, the big new picture house here. Tonight Mr. Fidler and Sylvia and Walter and Miss Merritt have gone out again. He was here tonight to dinner, too, but young folks can't stay in the house a single evening. Mr. Fidler is going away tomorrow but he will be back in a few weeks.

Love from all to your family and yourself,
Your ever loving brother,
Fred.

February 12

Dear Sister Sadie:

I do not like to have to take up the subject with you again, Sadie, but I wonder if you know any nice young men who would enjoy meeting a fine, lovely young girl like Sylvia, if they come to this town. I am writing this from the store because you know how Hannah is about Sylvia, but she would be happy if a nice young man should care for our daughter.

That Mr. Fidler was very nice but before he left he told Sylvia he was interested in a young lady in his home

town and while we were glad to open our home to him while he was here it was not what I would call much of a chance for Sylvia. I know how you feel about this, Sadie, but it would make me very happy if Sylvia could meet a nice young man.

I have been doing pretty well in business this winter so if Mr. Right, as they say, came along I could give him from 5 to 6 thousand dollars for a business or for a home. Let me know here at the store or the way you did before so Hannah won't know I wrote to you.

Your ever loving brother,
Fred.

May 11

Dear Sister Sadie:

You will be glad to know that on Monday our telephone rang and it was your friend, Mr. Richard Berger. He introduced himself to Sylvia and as soon as Sylvia learned he was a friend of her Aunt Sadie's she invited him right out to dinner.

Hannah, with Sylvia's help, got up a very fine dinner for Mr. Berger and he seemed to enjoy it, for Hannah, you know, is a grand cook and so is Sylvia when she wants to help her Mother. Walter had a date which he could not include Mr. Berger and Sylvia, so Mr. Berger and Sylvia stayed at home. Hannah and I urged them to go out because we know how young people are but Mr. Berger is a home boy and was tired besides, so Hannah and I went into the dining room and played Honeymoon Bridge because we felt that young people should be alone. They had on the television and at 10 o'clock Hannah took them in some nice sandwiches and a home made fruit drink, which Mr. Berger seemed to enjoy a great deal. Then he had to leave because he had an early business date. He

will telephone Sylvia again and maybe Walter and his girl friend, Wanda Merritt, the four of them can go someplace together.

I thought you would like to hear about Mr. Berger, who we like a great deal.

Your ever loving brother,

Fred.

August 15

Dear Sister Sadie:

Your ever welcome letter received and I am glad to note that you and your family are well, same I can say of my dear wife, son and daughter.

Sylvia and Walter are at the birthday party of Hannah's cousin, Luella Corwin's daughter. You met her when you were here. Rosalyn Corwin. She is twenty-four, today. A nice, quiet girl. Walter is escorting his sister and I think it is very nice for a brother to take his sister places and I wish my son would take his sister more but usually he is with his girl friend, Wanda Merritt. But tonight Miss Merritt had an engagement she could not get out of so Walter took his sister.

Hannah and I have been playing bridge every Thursday night with a club we call the "Thursday Night Out Club," because that is the night your maid goes out, though with two women in the house like Hannah and Sylvia we don't need a maid I won and Hannah lost so it about evened things up. We go with fine people, Sadie, four couples in all and we had a very good time.

Love from all of us to you and your family,

Your ever loving brother,

Fred.

P. S. Hannah has gone to bed, now, so I can say what I had in mind. We never saw Mr. Berger again. He sent Sylvia a post card saying that he was called out of town

on business. I guess he thought more of business than about meeting a fine girl so it is just as well Sylvia learned of this at the start. If any other young man you know comes to town we will do all in our power to make their stay enjoyable.

October 15

Dear Sister Sadie:

On Friday evening the telephone rang and it was your friend, Mr. Lester Morris, who was in town on business. Sylvia happened to be home and answered the telephone and invited Mr. Morris to dinner the next evening. Mr. Morris came with some beautiful flowers for Sylvia, which she put in a vase but they were so tall we couldn't leave them on the dining room table.

In the evening Sylvia and Mr. Morris and Walter went to the Palace, as Walter did not have a date because his girl friend, Miss Merritt, had a date which she could not get out of. Sylvia said they had a very good time.

We again invited Mr. Morris to dinner because on Sunday there is nothing to do in town and the meals are so bad at the Wilson House, where Mr. Morris is staying. Hannah baked a nice chicken and deep dish apple pie, which Mr. Morris said he does not get in a hotel and you can bet he is right because Sylvia helped her mother with the dinner and is getting to be as good a cook as Hannah is. After dinner Walter had a date for which he did not need the car so Sylvia showed Mr. Morris our city.

On Monday Mr. Morris took Sylvia to the Casino and then for a soda at the Palace of Sweets, where they met some of Sylvia's friends and had quite a nice time. Mr. Morris left on Tuesday but he will write to Sylvia, he told her.

I thought that you would want to know what a hit Mr. Morris made with Sylvia and with all of us.

Love from us all to you and yours,
Your ever loving brother,
Fred.

December 14

Dear Sister Sadie:

Well, Sadie, today I have some wonderful news for you. It is about Lester Morris and our darling Sylvia. Well, last night Lester asked our darling to marry him!

Hannah and I were playing Honeymoon Bridge in the dining room when he proposed to her in the living room and they came right in to tell us. You can imagine how happy Hannah and self are, because Lester is such a fine, upright young man, as you, yourself, know.

They will be married in early Spring and I will give them money to buy a house in the suburbs and Lester will go into business in town and give up his travelling position, which is not so much these days, anyhow. I would not like to see her married to a man who travelled.

With Sylvia married Hannah and I will be well satisfied. We are not in a hurry for Walter to marry for he is still young but with his sister married I do not think it will be long before he is married, too. I will be proud, Sadie, with two married children. And before long maybe someone to call me Grandpa, but that is counting your chickens before they are hatched, as they say.

Love from all to you and your family,
Your loving brother,
Fred.

January 12

Dear Sister Sadie:

Just a few lines to let you know that we are well.

Lester left town yesterday. Before he left I went with him and Sylvia to select a ring for Sylvia. I got it for him wholesale. It will be ready in a few days. We will not announce Sylvia's engagement until the ring is on her finger, though Hannah wrote the news to her relatives in Centralia.

Shall write you again soon.

Love from all to your family and yourself, in haste,
Your loving brother,

Fred.

P. S. It tickles Hannah when Lester helps her in the kitchen and calls her Mother. Sylvia had a few girls at the house Tuesday afternoon and Lester sent her a beautiful doll, so you can imagine the noise the girls made when it came.

January 18

Dear Sister Sadie:

Just a few lines to let you know the news. After he is married to Sylvia Lester will then go into business here or into the store with me. We do not want him on the road so he will give up his job before the wedding takes place.

We will announce the engagement at a party on Saturday night. Sylvia has her ring and it is really beautiful—one a girl can well be proud of. We are so happy to see Sylvia is so in love with Lester and has forgotten that wretch, Terry Wells, an automobile mechanic and no one suitable for Sylvia, who once she acted very foolish over but who she does not think of any more at all.

Hannah and Sylvia are planning a very nice supper for Saturday. I wish that you or some of your family could be here.

Love from us all to you and yours, in haste,
Your ever loving brother,

Fred.

March 3

Dear Sister Sadie:

Well, Sylvia and Lester were married last night so now, as I tell everyone, I have not lost a daughter but have gained a son. It was a beautiful home wedding and I wish some of you folks could have come here for it. Hannah's sister and her brother-in-law came up from Centralia.

Sylvia had as her attendants her third cousin, Rosalyn Corwin, her best friend, Freda Gore, who was matron of honor as she is a married woman and Walter's girl friend, Wanda Merritt. Walter was the best man. The house was decorated in Early Spring flowers and we had a caterer in, though Hannah baked some of the cakes herself, Sylvia helping, for they wanted to have some of their own cooking at the wedding and it was better than a caterer could have done. Lester's relatives could not come so it was just a small home wedding. I'll put a clipping from our newspaper in with this letter and you will see how much the paper thinks of us and Sylvia.

Right after the wedding Sylvia and Lester left for Atlantic City. They will be gone two weeks and will see everything including a visit to New York. Sylvia has never been in New York but Lester has. I know they will have a good time.

When they come back they are not going to house-keeping right away. Lester wanted to but I said it was a shame to spend the money now, especially with Lester not having anything to do since he gave up his road job which didn't amount to much any more, anyhow, and has not found anything yet, so I told them to take Sylvia's room for which we bought a complete suite of ten pieces only three years ago. She will have to put away some of the ornaments now that it is partly a man's room. Sylvia said that anything we decided on would suit her. She is

a fine, good girl and deserves the fine young man she is married to.

Well I know you will be glad to know we are all so happy. I don't think it will be long now before Walter is married and settled down the way he feels about Wanda Merritt and we will be happier than ever.

Sylvia got beautiful presents. Two tables in the living room full. I forgot to mention the flat silver you sent but Sylvia will thank you herself. It will come in handy when the young couple have their own home.

I am too tired to write more. I said to Hannah that we are on the shelf with a married daughter.

With love to you all from us here,
Your loving brother,
Fred.

August 21

Dear Sister Sadie:

Your ever welcome letter received this morning. Am sorry you are not feeling well but hope you will be O.K. by the time these few lines reach you.

My darling wife, God bless her. Sylvia and son, also self, are thank God well but my newly wed son-in-law ought to be in H——!

He has left our house! He is probably at the Wilson House. And Sylvia WILL GET A DIVORCE!

I know this news will be a surprise to you, Sadie. And believe me, we are more than surprised. Hannah and self did as much and more for him than for our own children.

How can a man change the way he has! He is a second Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. My poor darling wife is so nervous and unstrung over all this. Sylvia, God bless her, is trying to make the best of it. She has been so unhappy the last few weeks, unknown to us and now she is glad

to have it over. There is nothing so bad it could not have been worse.

Sadie, I thought so much of Lester I would have given him all I possess. But thank Heavens *I DID NOT!*

Hannah and I were in Centralia for two weeks, visiting Hannah's family. When we left nothing was wrong between Sylvia and that WRETCH. Our darling child was happy. Walter was helping me in business and Sylvia married. Our pleasure was complete. We thought we could have a little change.

While we were gone something happened. We do not know what. And our darling Sylvia says that suddenly Lester told her he no longer loved her. Does that seem possible, Sadie, out of a clear sky?

Anyhow, Sadie, we got home the day before yesterday and yesterday Lester packed his bags, said good-bye and left our house!

Today he came into the store and told me he had left Sylvia!

Sylvia was married 5 months and 16 days. Then the damn wretch left our house! How disappointed we all are in Lester Morris! Well, we will have to make the best of this unfortunate trouble.

Love to you and your family from all of us,
Your brother,
Fred.

August 23

Dear Sister Sadie:

No doubt you were terrible shocked and surprised at my letter in regard to Lester. I hope my dear wife will get over this. Now she is a nervous wreck, Sadie.

We thought the world of him, Sadie. How a man could change so is something that cannot be described in writing. He says he cannot live with our darling Sylvia! And I,

myself, up to a few weeks ago, never met such a happy couple!

Sylvia said he changed suddenly while we were in Centralia, saying he wanted a divorce. She told him she was happy and didn't want a divorce. She cried all night and could not sleep.

The papers were signed this afternoon. My lawyer fixed them. Lester would not tell Walter nor the attorney nor self why he wanted to get rid of Sylvia. He said no one will ever find out. The lawyer told me he would try his utmost to find out.

And Lester told me though I never asked him, that his money was so fixed that no one could get it. I never knew he had any money.

I have the store to think about, but my poor wife and daughter are the sufferers having nothing to think of. We never deserved this in our little family. Lester was a grand man when we first met. What turned him against our darling daughter? We nor she can not explain.

You ought to see the good time we had on his birthday. Hannah cooked everything he liked.

I'll close for today as I do not want to trouble you with a longer letter. Lester changed from a diamond to a piece of coal. We cannot find out why because he has always been as silent as a clam. But poor Sylvia, of all her girl friends, is unhappy. We are all broken up.

Love to all from your broken hearted brother,
Fred.

August 24

Dear Sister Sadie:

I again write a few lines to let you know what is going on here. Last night at the dinner table Sylvia said to Hannah and self that she is going to call up Lester at the

Wilson House and have a talk with him. Well, Lester told her to meet him at the hotel.

She left at 8 o'clock. And lo and behold this morning they both came to the store and said they were going to try to forget the past. Sylvia, I see now, was maybe a little to blame, as they must learn one another's ways. I hope they will not get a divorce. I will close now and get a little dinner. I have not eaten anything for several days as I have had no appetite.

Love to all, assuring you I shall keep you posted in regard to Sylvia and Lester.

I am your ever loving brother,
Fred.

August 26

Dear Sister Sadie:

This will be my last letter to you about that skunk, Lester, for he has gone—and I hope to H——! When our poor darling Sylvia went to the Wilson House he had the poor child sign some papers and gave her 6 notes for \$500 each and she signed a paper releasing that scoundrel from all claims, alimony, etc., she could bring against him.

She is back home. And only two days ago he said they would start all over again! He is a lying skunk and did not mean that at all.

This morning she called up the hotel and he had checked out. The lawyer told me that if he got Sylvia to sign a paper this will release him of everything.

Sadie, can you believe it, the lawyer now tells me that he finally almost as much as told the lawyer, when the lawyer kept after him that he wanted a divorce because Sylvia was not true to him and had deceived him before and after her marriage. And now I know he told Sylvia practically the same thing when she went to the hotel.

Sadie, outside of once running around with a garage

mechanic named Terry Wells, which never amounted to anything, Sylvia has never done anything in her whole life to displease Hannah or self.

Lester has made us all miserable. Should such a man go unpunished? I would like to stab him or do him some other harm but I want to live for my poor wife and family. He is afraid of me but my hands are tied.

We are all in the dark about Lester's horrible actions toward our darling daughter, who, the Lord knows, deserves a man who would appreciate and love her. She loved him to the very last. I trust he will get his just dues for he wrecked my family for some time to come.

I shall not write any more about this skunk because he has left town. I am heartbroken on account of my poor daughter.

With love to all I remain your ever loving brother,
Fred.

P. S. I wonder if he will pay those notes when they are due.

Sept. 5

Dear Sister Sadie:

Your ever welcome letter just received.

Now do not feel bad on account of the doings of that miserable scoundrel. You only wished for the best. We were getting along so nicely before we met that wretch and all we needed to complete our happiness was a good husband for Sylvia. When Lester Morris came we were overjoyed but not for long. You are not to blame because my poor wife is a nervous wreck.

My poor daughter yesterday told me she did not even read what he told her to sign. And once I even told that wretch he could go into business with me! I would undoubtedly have bought them a home or started him in business if he had only waited a while. I had nothing but

fatherly feeling for him. Just think, when I came back from Centralia and brought Walter a tie I brought that scoundrel a tie, too! When he left the house he left the tie, which he had never worn. I said I'll wear the new tie and Walter took the cuff links that Hannah had given him, which he left, too.

Luckily Sylvia still has the bonds I gave her when she was married. She told that wretch he could use them but luckily he never did. Oh, what an elegant life he had with us! It seems he was under the impression we wanted his money—and I never knew he had any until he was gone.

Sylvia says that on her honeymoon he was a perfect gentleman. And that he was simply grand after they returned home.

While we were in Centralia something happened. I do not know what. And Lester told Sylvia if people were unhappy together they should get a divorce. She told him why Lester I am happy and dearly love you. And she does yet, if the truth be known, for she never thinks of anyone but Lester, not even of that bum, Terry Wells, she once used to care about, who, Walter told me, is back in town again, though Sylvia luckily does not know this for she has enough on her mind and I hope she won't find out, though she no longer thinks of him at all.

When Sylvia met Lester at the hotel he even brought up the fact that they didn't have a home of their own though he and Sylvia had a beautiful room and he ate Hannah's fine meals and they intended getting a home when he was settled. But he said that was not what made him leave Sylvia. I know, now, that Sylvia finally got out of him that he had got a letter from someone saying Sylvia was not true to him and the letter gave even the license number of the car she went out in. Can you imagine that! And my poor daughter, a good and pure girl, never in her

life doing anything wrong. Sylvia asked to see the letter but he would not show it to her and it was too late when she finally told me for me to do anything about it. That wretch believed Sylvia had an affair with some man before and after her marriage which she had never told him about! Isn't that a terrible thing to believe about a lovely girl like Sylvia?

Now in this state a man need not pay alimony to a wife unless she has children so Sylvia cannot get a cent, though if she can collect those notes she is that much to the good. The lawyer says he can make it hot for that skunk if he comes to town and these notes are not paid.

Sylvia went out with the girls yesterday but she told Hannah she sees Lester before her all the time, even though he told her, just to have something to say, that she was a bad girl. What a mean liar—for Sylvia had told her mother all about her honeymoon.

My lawyer told me not to get excited so I stopped carrying the knife I had with me for I must live for my family, though I wish him in H——! But you are not to blame. Time brings many changes. We were such a happy family.

Love to you all from us,
Your ever loving brother,
Fred.

Sept. 11

Dear Sister Sadie:

Your welcome letter received this morning and answer at once. Am pleased to know you are well, same I can say for my darling wife and family today.

About that skunk—do not worry I will not beat him up or injure him in any way for my lawyer says I must live for Hannah and the children and besides I do not think he is in town.

Hannah and Sylvia go to picture shows and different places to divert their minds but Sylvia says that skunk is before her all the time.

I have written you nothing but trouble but I feel relieved when I can write and explain everything. The case will not come up for some time and Sylvia can withdraw this in a minute's notice but the lawyer thinks the quicker he is out of our minds the better for all of us.

With love to you all from all of us I am,

Your ever loving brother,

Fred.

P. S. Sylvia has her engagement ring. She must have had a presentiment for she did not wear it to the hotel. Oh, that wretch, to believe stories about his innocent wife! Now I am an Atheist and believe in nothing!

December 2

Dear Sister Sadie:

Your ever welcome letter received today and answer at once. We are all thank God well and am pleased to know you are well. Allow me to thank you for self and family for the turkey sent us as a Thanksgiving present.

I am sorry I forgot your birthday and your anniversary. My heart was so full I forgot everybody and everything but thank God I am back to earth again.

Hannah and Sylvia still bring up Lester's name but no doubt will get over this in time. Last year that scoundrel had Thanksgiving dinner with us, for he was courting Sylvia.

Again thanking you for the turkey which I hope some day to reciprocate, with love to you all from all of us,

I am your ever loving brother,

Fred.

July 19

Dear Sister Sadie:

Although you owe me a letter cannot refrain from writing you a few lines, informing you of the welcome news that Sylvia received her divorce from that wretch yesterday morning. She is now, thank God, free, which is far better than to live the life she had for five months.

There was a large item in our yesterday's paper and send you the clipping. By this item everyone in town can see that it was not Sylvia's fault. That is fine, for since that bum, Wells, is back in town, Sylvia sees him sometimes by accident and you know how people gossip about nothing.

When I was in the Judge's office I told Walter, who was there with Sylvia and self, that a certain man sitting near the Judge was a newspaper reporter. You see I was right as usual.

With love to you all I am your loving brother,
Fred.

FIVE MONTHS OF HONEYMOON

Couple Divorced on Wife's Charges

Sylvia Morris, 29, 362 Elm Street, was granted a divorce from Lester Morris, address unknown, in the Court of Domestic Relations yesterday. They were married March 2, and separated August 21, last year. Mrs. Morris testified his temper and his associations with other women caused her to leave him.

November 16

Dear Sister Sadie:

Not having heard from you for some time thought I would write you a few lines to let you know that we are all thank God well, hoping they will find you and yours the same.

Sylvia is going away on a trip. She, and a friend of hers, leave here on the 21st of this month for Columbia, Missouri. They bought their tickets and sleepers yesterday. The friend has a sister-in-law in Columbia, who wrote her to come and bring a girl friend along. They can have a nice time. You can't tell what will come of a trip like that as there are lots of fine young men in Columbia as a college is there. Sylvia is too old for college boys but she will meet professors, too. I am glad Sylvia will get away because she sometimes sees that bum, Wells, by accident and if she is out of town she cannot run into him.

I will close today for I have no more news to write. I have not ordered my Thanksgiving turkey yet but there is time for that. We will be at home on Thanksgiving and buying a turkey is cheaper than buying medicine. Hope you all remain well.

With love to you all from all here,

I am your loving brother,

Fred.

November 22

Dear Sister Sadie:

Your ever welcome letter I received this morning, happy to know you are all well, same I can thank God say for all of us.

We heard from Sylvia this morning, stating that she arrived safe in Columbia, Missouri. I hope something comes of this visit.

Thank you for the nuts you sent us. Also thanks for the turkey, which I will be looking for on Tuesday or Wednesday. I have already countermanded the order given my poultryman for a 15 pound turkey, for though Sylvia

is away, we will invite company for as you know Hannah is a fine cook.

With love from us all,

Your ever loving brother,
Fred.

January 8

Dear Sister Sadie:

You owe me a letter but I will have to write and tell you the news about our son, Walter, and Rosalyn Corwin.

When that Wanda Merritt, who our son once thought he was so crazy about, became engaged to that Mr. Fidler, who you once sent to meet our family, I said to him, Walter, why don't you go with Rosalyn Corwin, who is a sweet girl and from a good family, a third cousin of Hannah's. He said she is so quiet. But to make a long story short he went with her several times, taking her to the theater, etc.

Yesterday morning, going down town in our car, he said Dad, I have good news to tell you, I am engaged to Rosalyn Corwin. He has not given her a ring but will do so the latter part of the week. Tonight at dinner he told Hannah and Sylvia and they were so pleased they could hardly speak. They both knew he went with Rosalyn Corwin but did not think he loved her enough to marry her.

He has been in the business with me two years now so for a wedding present I will give him a 1/3 interest.

I did not suspect anything, though on her birthday he paid \$27.50 for her present, perfume and other things. I surely did not think Walter was so much in love.

That bum, Wells, a garage mechanic who people gossiped about when Sylvia met him by accident has left town, for good this time I'm glad to say.

Sylvia met a fine young man, a Mr. Stanley Tucker, the other night, and he is coming here to dinner tonight

and then is taking her out. I do not know if it is anything serious but we hope for the best. After her dreadful marriage experience and escape from that wretch, Lester, it will take a very fine young man to make Sylvia even want to be married again.

I have written you a long letter telling you all the news so will close.

With love to all from here.

I am your loving brother,
Fred.

INTERVIEW

ALBERTA BIDDLE, who wrote "Stars as I Know Them," for *Screen Stars Magazine*, held her coat—imitation beaver—the way she thought movie stars held theirs as she gave her name and asked if Lily Trent were in.

"Go up to Suite D9," said the clerk, who looked like an expressionless lemon.

On the way up Miss Biddle began thinking of a beginning for her interpretation of the life of Lily Trent. A lot of magazine stories had already been written about her, Miss Biddle knew. And these did not always agree with news stories which had also been printed. Miss Biddle admired Lily Trent tremendously—felt that she had been badly mistreated by reporters. Well, what did that matter? Here was Miss Trent, still a star, even if she could no longer play ingénues, with a suite in the best New York hotel, a home in Hollywood, admirers, everything, and still important enough to write about—while the reporters who maligned her were still only reporters. If they had their jobs at all.

Miss Biddle knocked on the door of Suite D9. Her pinched little face took on the expression of one about to enter a place of worship. She wet her lips. The lipstick she used was the wrong color—just as her blouse was the wrong color. They were gifts of stars she had interviewed—Miss Biddle was not a gift-horse gazer.

A maid in a neat cap and apron ushered her into a correct living room, formal, cold; too full of satin-covered furniture. Miss Biddle did not notice that the flowers were hanging their heads wearily.

"Miss Trent will see you in a few minutes." Miss Biddle felt that the maid's hushed voice was as it should be. She sat down on an uncomfortable chair.

A woman came in briskly. She was buxom, with a curved nose and full, dark lips. Miss Trent's secretary. Miss Biddle wondered why Lily Trent had a secretary of this type, though she had heard that Sally Mason mothered her, kept undesirable people away. She seemed so coarse for this position.

"Howjdo!" she said harshly. "Miss Trent's just getting up. Be right in. Awfully busy here in New York. Seeing you as a special favor. No other interviews this visit."

Miss Biddle didn't want to contradict her, though she knew of several other writers who were seeing Lily Trent. Oh, well, she knew she'd get a good story. Miss Trent was always so—well, gracious.

Sally Mason listened, turned toward the door. Alberta Biddle stood up. They both waited. A door closed down the private hallway. Lily Trent came into the room.

You would have known she was a screen celebrity. She was slender and her hair lay in golden curls flat against her head. Her face was all of a tone, covered with a beige make-up which seemed as thick as cream. Her nose was small and straight, her cheekbones high. Her eyes were wide apart and rather ridiculously made up, with deep blue shadows above them and exaggerated lashes. Her eyebrows were thin half-circles which gave her an expression of constant inquiry.

Her mouth was red and full. She was wearing a negligee of turquoise brocade and she held in her hand a single white orchid—her fad for the moment. Last year it was

Southern magnolias; but those were too hard to get—and too large.

"My dear Alberta!"

Lily Trent's voice was low and deep. She made a great pretense of kissing Miss Biddle.

"You're looking simply beautiful!" Miss Biddle managed, though she was almost overcome.

"I'm a wreck! Your New York and late hours do terrible things to me!" She laughed to show she didn't think she was a wreck at all. Her laughter made her remarks seem clever and important. She never laughed after anyone else's remarks.

"Now, Miss Trent!" protested Alberta Biddle.

"Have you had breakfast?" Lily Trent sank into the biggest chair. "I'm starving. We can talk after we've ordered."

Miss Biddle had hoped the interview would include breakfast. She had eaten hours before, but breakfast with Lily Trent was not the sort of thing a movie interviewer refused.

"Breakfast is the most delightful meal."

Lily Trent was very gay. "Sparkling" and "casual" were two of the things Miss Biddle would say about her. "I always say, if I can have breakfast and tea I can skip luncheon. Dinners are fun, too— a few friends and candle-light. I loathe formal meals—and a lot to drink. I never drink at all, you know. The way I was brought up, I guess. I still feel it isn't—feminine."

Miss Biddle snapped up the words with her pale, earnest eyes. Why, the interview would write itself if Miss Trent kept on. Miss Trent kept on.

"An omelet? That's too usual. Eggs Florentine. They do them well here. And I'm keen for dozens of little hot muffins. And a great pot of coffee. You order, Sally. Alberta and I can start chatting. What kind of a story do you want,

dear? I don't know a thing exciting—I'm just happy with my work and my home and my friends. But you write such lovely stories I know I'm safe in your hands. I can be myself. Only, you'll be careful. Some of the stories—"

"I know!" Miss Biddle nodded vigorously. "This is a story from the time you were a little girl. For my series, 'Stars as I Know Them.' Maybe you've noticed—"

"I'm afraid I haven't, dear." Miss Trent smiled sweetly. She had been quite annoyed when she saw, each month, the stories Miss Biddle had written about other stars, and had turned the page quickly, searching for her own publicity.

"I want to know all the little things about your life," said Miss Biddle. "Your admirers know the main facts, but I want you to tell me the things you've never told before. Then I can give my own version."

"How nice!" Lily Trent nodded understandingly. "You mean from when I was a little girl?"

"Yes."

Alberta Biddle leaned forward.

"I had a pleasant but not very remarkable childhood." Lily Trent laughed—that low laugh, at herself—again. "We lived in a big old house. Mississippi. My people were cotton planters. But they'd lost most of their money by the time I was born. You know—poor but proud. I wasn't one of the rich girls who go on the stage for fun."

"And when you were little, Miss Trent?"

"Of course! Well, I wasn't very pretty. Really, I wasn't. My older sister was much prettier. There—I don't think I've ever told anyone that. She was a home girl. She died three years ago."

Lily Trent looked very sad. Miss Biddle felt that if her fans could see her like this they'd never believe any of the stories the newspapers printed about her.

Lily Trent was thinking. About Agnes. Imagine telling that for one of their damned stories! Why, it was what happened to Agnes that made her what she was. Agnes was a good kid. Sweet. Even if they had lived on the worst street in town, Agnes could have kept away from Tony Prescott. Lily'd never have trusted Tony.

She'd never forget waking up and finding Agnes crying. Great, heavy sobs. Her head buried in her pillow.

"Oh, God!" Agnes cried. "What am I going to do?"

She muttered that sentence over and over again. When she finally sat up, her eyes were swollen and red-rimmed. And she told Lily—Tony had got her into trouble!

Pa found out. He couldn't help it, the way Agnes cried all the time. He knew what to do. He forced Tony to marry Agnes. And Agnes not seventeen.

Lily didn't know, now, if that had been the best thing. It seemed the best thing then.

Agnes had the baby. Tony was drunk all the time. And ran around with women. And half of the time there wasn't enough food in the house. And Agnes getting old before her time. It was Agnes who helped Lily make up her mind never to let any man put anything over on her.

Ma helped, too, if it came to that. Poor pa! He wasn't mean like Tony. He was just worthless. One job after another, from the railroad to odd jobs. He'd got into trouble a couple of times. She hadn't known what it was about, but ma's eyes had been red for days.

Poor Agnes! Now she was dead. The last years Lily had done all she could for her, though as she grew older Agnes grew hard, and drank too much, always expecting things and taking it for granted that a movie star had to look out for her relatives. They had all sort of black-mailed her—you pay us and we'll keep out of your way. Well, Agnes was dead, and pa and ma were dead, and Tony had disappeared. The kid was always getting into

trouble and needing help. He was a bad egg—like Tony. Well, if he just stayed away from her!

“You haven’t any people at all?” asked Miss Biddle.
“No one.”

Lily Trent’s eyes filled with tears. “My parents are dead. I—I never had any babies.”

“But you have so many friends,” said Miss Biddle. She’d written, ‘A Girl Against the World.’ “Now tell me about your school days.”

“You know how schools are in small towns,” laughed Lily Trent.

She visualized the school. A great cube of brick, with a yard worn bare of grass. The teachers, frustrated women who flattered the children of the town’s prominent citizens. Those children were smug-faced little brats who wouldn’t play with her. She remembered falling asleep, her eyes wet with tears, because of the way they’d treated her. Well, if she hadn’t hated them so, she might have stayed in that awful town, as Agnes did.

Lily Trent smiled and told imaginary things about a pleasant little-girl life in a small town.

“And when you left school you came to New York and got on the stage.” prompted Miss Biddle. “You must have been ambitious right from the start.”

Ambitious right from the start! That was good. She hadn’t thought of getting ahead. She hated everyone—wanted to get even with the kids who had laughed at her, or who hadn’t noticed her at all.

She stopped school in eighth grade. She was a lanky kid with straw-colored hair and light eyelashes. She spent the next years mooning around. Dreaming about nothing.

Restless. Miserable. Unhappy. "Wanting out." And running around with all kinds of boys—though pa beat her when she got in late.

"I had my dreams," said Lily Trent, "but my parents didn't believe in careers for women. I wanted to do something—and I feel nothing can be accomplished without a dream back of it."

Miss Biddle sucked some more of the wrong color off her lips. This was the kind of thing her readers loved! "Did you have sweethearts when you were a girl?"

She'd had sweethearts. One, a shy kid, as pitiful and wistful as she. She hadn't let herself care for him. She wondered what had become of him. It wasn't until she met Don that she cared, really, for anyone. Donald! She could still see him. Slim. Good-looking. His father was one of the rich men of the town. Don picked her up in his car. He seemed wonderful. He had been to college. He knew all of the things she wanted to know.

She went driving with Don. She met him around the corner, so pa wouldn't know. Pa distrusted every man with money.

At first the drives were grand. She and Don away from the world. The wind in their faces. And talking about life.

Then Don wanted more than kisses. She knew too much for that. Didn't she have Agnes for example? Don didn't want marriage. Pa wouldn't have been able to force him into it. She fought against Don, and he grew sullen. And, in the room where Agnes had cried and asked God what she was going to do, Lily cried because she didn't want to lose Don—and didn't know how to hold him.

Everything was against her. Other girls had nice homes. There was noplac she could see Don but in his car—and

then he wanted to make love. She didn't want anyone to get the better of her.

And one night, when she went out to the car, there sat Don's father instead. Sullen—like Don when he wasn't getting his own way.

They drove down the streets where she and Don had had such lovely rides. He offered her money to give up Don!

"You are ruining his future," he said.

She didn't say that she knew she would have had to give up Don anyhow. She wanted to laugh, to shriek, to throw the money dramatically in his face.

She sat there, instead, huddled in the seat. Don was gone anyhow. Why not let his father pay? Pay because she'd never had a chance with Don.

She left the car with five hundred dollars. She gave some to Agnes. With the rest she came to New York.

"Yes, I had a first sweetheart."

Lily Trent smiled at Miss Biddle. "But ambition and young love don't always go together. One must be sacrificed. You might tell the girls all over America for me," she laughed, "to think a long time before saying no to the boy next door. A small town and the boy you love may mean fewer heartbreaks. You know the old saying, 'Home-keeping hearts are happiest.'"

"Oh, yes!" Miss Biddle knew she was getting lovely material. "I know all your admirers are glad you didn't stay at home. And after you came to New York—what happened then?"

Lily Trent, in her husky voice, told of the long hours in theatrical offices. She gave more axioms of success.

"It was a long time before I got my start," she said. "I felt the tug of real poverty. I couldn't ask my parents for more money."

Damn right she couldn't! Pa was still sore because she left home. Ma never had a cent. It had taken her a long time to get a start. New York wasn't as easy a nut to crack as she had hoped. Too many pretty girls were looking for the same things. She could have known a hundred men—cheap, all of them. She remembered Agnes. She wanted to make something of herself now. She was as pretty and as smart as other girls. And she didn't want to have anything to do with men who couldn't help her—or might be hard to get rid of later on.

The money went for cheap but smart clothes, and for the rather pathetic room, three flights up—narrow, cold. Not that she had had much at home—but she wanted so much more—in New York.

She met Adolph Hillman, the theatrical manager. A silly old man with a big nose and folds under his chin. His hands were gross. She could feel them, now, on her shoulder. Could feel his fat lips against hers. Was it for this she had turned away from Don? Well, Adolph Hillman had more to offer.

Was it enough—fame and Hillman in exchange for herself? She went over it a hundred times in that awful little room. What else could she do?

In a way, it was amazing that she had this chance—Hillman choosing her from all the girls he could have had.

She moved to an apartment Hillman picked out for her. A gloomy place, too full of large, carved furniture; heavy mirrors; brown woodwork; a smell of decay.

What did it matter? When she was a success she could get away from Adolph Hillman.

Lily didn't know what would have happened if Fate hadn't stepped in. Like a corny melodrama.

She'd never forget that night. What if she told this funny little rabbit-faced reporter about it?

Lightning quick, the events unwound themselves—like a film turned too rapidly.

Adolph Hillman sent her to see one of his shows, met her in the lobby afterward. They went to the gloomy apartment. And he talked largely of what he'd do for her—in exchange for what she could do for him. This hideous old man! In what other way, without influence or background or talent, could she get ahead?

He kissed her. She tried to kiss him in return. Then he started to make love to her. And he was too old.

Lily struggled against him. And suddenly he sat back in his chair. His face grew pale and he began to gasp for breath. She ran to get him a glass of water.

He pushed her away when she brought it. His breath was heavier, labored.

A white froth on his lips changed to rust color, and he fought for air as if he were drowning.

He was quiet, then, and his chin dropped. And his eyes were suddenly sunken, as if he were wearing a mask. Lily didn't need anyone to tell her that he was dead.

Alone in the apartment with Adolph Hillman, living, was one thing. It was another thing, alone with Adolph Hillman, dead. For an awful moment she had the feeling that she had killed him. Then she got hold of herself.

She knew he had a fat wife and three homely daughters in New Rochelle. She couldn't call them. She knew it was too late to call a doctor.

She telephoned wildly. To his office. Sometimes his secretary stayed late. There was no answer. She tried to get his brother. He was not home! She tried clubs, restaurants. She tried to locate intimate business associates. She couldn't stay with a dead man! There must be someone!

She telephoned his brother's home every five minutes. Finally he answered. She could hardly speak. She choked

out something. In fifteen minutes the brother and a friend of his were there.

She told them what had happened. The other man got something for her to drink.

Lily knew what was going on—but it was more as if she were seeing a play. The men held the old man between them, a sagging figure who was to pass for drunk if anyone saw them. They went out to the waiting car. Lily wondered how many other men were not allowed the peace of growing cold where they died.

The next day Adolph Hillman's death was in all the newspapers. He had spent the evening at his theater and then had gone to his brother's home. His death had been instantaneous. Heart trouble.

Joe Hillman gave Lily a part in a play. Not as good as Adolph had promised her, but better than swinging her heels in an agent's office, or her purse on Sixth Avenue. A first step up.

She smiled brightly at Miss Biddle.

"It was through dear old Adolph Hillman that I got my start," she said. "He was my first real friend in New York. I owe so much to that dead, generous soul who helped so many ambitious girls. His death was a permanent blow to the American stage. After that, other roles came. Small at first. Long hours of rehearsal—"

She talked prettily of those first difficult years.

The breakfast things came in. Lily Trent, as always, was a gracious hostess. She pressed food on Miss Biddle, who ate greedily, not noticing that Miss Trent only nibbled at a muffin. Between bites Miss Biddle pursued her questions:

"Didn't you marry Richard Trimmer then? Tell me about that romance."

"I admired him from the first time I saw him," said

Lily Trent. "I was so flattered because he noticed me. He was years older. I've always liked older men. He was such a dear."

"But you separated?"

Lily Trent opened her eyes very wide. "When two people are no longer in love I think it is a sin for them to stay together. I think the marriage vows should read, 'Till the death of love us do part.' I really do."

She really never loved Trimmer. He was producing a play which interested her, though nearly any play interested her then. A pompous gray-haired man who bored her with his long dissertations. But she learned from him. Art. Music. The theater. Food and wine. People. She had learned nothing from Hillman, who was vastly ignorant under a thin coating of theater.

Trimmer was a man of the world. She was lucky. Hillman had been old and foolish—and she was very young. Trimmer gave her a new estimation of herself.

She had done nothing to attract Hillman. To attract Rick Trimmer she had used all of her knowledge of women—and men. A hundred tricks.

She was no longer for sale for a role. Other women demanded matrimony. Why not Lily Trent?

There was one obstacle. Trimmer was married to Lucinda Ray. Lucinda Ray was no longer pretty or young.

Lily Trent was the only one surprised when Rick Trimmer married her. To the others in the theater it was the usual thing. A producer falls in love with an ingénue, gets his wife to divorce him. It was as simple as that.

She forged ahead. To leads. She was pretty, young. She became popular. She studied English, music, French, German. She and Rick went to Europe, spending the days as well as the nights on her education.

It was too bad that Rick was unlucky in the theater,

and that he started to drink. And drinking made him unpleasant. She remembered the horrible brawls. You couldn't expect a girl like Lily Trent to stay with a man who drank all the time—and who couldn't even support her. Especially when she found she could get along on her own.

“Outside of the pain of parting, I shall always remember most pleasantly my years with Richard Trimmer,” she told Miss Biddle.

“It was after your divorce that you made your Hollywood success?”

Lily Trent nodded, and told gay little things about her beginnings in Hollywood, that mythical and amusing wonderland.

“Hollywood has been greatly maligned,” she said. “It is really just a small town full of dear, understanding people as well as the more colorful and spectacular ones. My friends are really stay-at-homes. We have little dinner parties, go to bed early.”

“I know,” said Miss Biddle—who felt she knew. “But weren't there any men you cared about then?”

“There were men I liked and admired,” said Lily Trent. But you know how the world misinterprets a star's slightest move. Have dinner with a man a couple of times and your name is linked with his. I like to feel I have real men friends in Hollywood.”

Friends! Lee Dorset who took her to Hollywood, and who was all business—even in love-making and poker-playing. She learned hardness from Lee—if she needed hardness. Well, she gave Lee as much as she got from him. The stage hadn't offered her anything that year and Lee had offered a great deal. She made good in Hollywood.

She grew tired of Lee, just as he grew tired of her.

Funny, when they met now, they were—friends. They could talk of the newest movie, the newest scandal, with never a tremor of emotion.

Other men, too, interested her. And then bored her—or were no longer of any help. How horrified the little rabbit across the table would be if she told her of some of the things that had happened. The scene with Drew Colby when they quarreled and threw a whole set of dishes at each other, one dish at a time, and in the end stood bloody but unbowed, knee-deep in broken crockery. And Treve Martin, with his spells of depression and insight—and his unreality. She didn't know for a long time that it was a drug that stimulated Martin. He was dead now. She was glad to remember that his last months had been peaceful.

The telephone bit in. Sally Mason answered it from an extension in another room, while Lily pressed her hands together until the knuckles were white—and pretended she was not waiting.

"It was nothing," reported Sally.

"Your marriage to Wayne Andrews," said Miss Biddle. "Are—are you happy together?"

"Why, yes." Lily Trent laughed. "If anyone is really happy who has an adult mind. In many ways it is a beautiful marriage."

A beautiful marriage! Wouldn't Wayne laugh at that! He'd see the story the rabbit would write. He always read the fan magazines, looking for things about himself.

She remembered the first time she saw Wayne. She was wearing an empress's robe, and he was a Roman slave. He gave the obvious quotation when they met—and he had seen to it that they met. He was an extra player then.

How young he seemed, and careless and gay. She did not learn for a long time that, though his youth was real, the carelessness and gaiety were as much a part of his pose as his calmness.

She liked him from the first. He had seen to that, too. It wasn't until later that she fell in love with him. So fully, so deeply in love that the thought of it, even now, made her tremble. She was no longer young. She should have known better.

She hadn't known better. With Wayne she forgot all she had learned—from Agnes, from Rick, from Lee.

Wayne had married a little nobody when he was twenty-one and singing in cheap night clubs. He got a divorce. Those who knew about it blamed her—though the marriage was broken before she met Wayne. Luckily, no one remembered that, years before, Rick Trimmer had got a divorce in order to marry her.

Wayne was the person she had been years before! He wanted to get ahead. He saw in her the person who could help him. Lily was a star, and Wayne was a young and handsome extra man with his own future to look out for. Just as Lily Trent had had her own future.

The little nobody he divorced acted very badly and gave out all sorts of ugly publicity—though she'd never even had her name in the newspapers before!

Lily and Wayne were married. Lily never even thought this marriage over, the way she had thought things out before. To her it was beautiful that Wayne loved her, wanted to marry her. It seemed the fruition of all she had worked for.

She built a larger home in Beverly Hills. There was a specially designed swimming pool. Tennis courts. Servants enough to run things properly. And into this stepped Wayne Andrews, erstwhile of cheap roominghouses, of small-time

night clubs and extra parts, mostly in Westerns. And Lily smiled happily because he consented to step in.

She was so happy those first years! She still could hardly think about it.

Wayne got ahead, as he had planned. First, as her leading man, when her public wanted to see them together. Then, as she edged into young-matrimon and young-mother roles, Wayne became a star in his own right.

Lily couldn't remember when she first learned that Wayne was untrue to her.

Lily Trent saved face, pretended she didn't know. Maybe everything would come out all right. She loved Wayne, didn't want to lose him altogether.

Wayne was still young—and he wanted to be free. She, Lily Trent, idol of thousands of movie fans, groveled in her attempts to hold him.

"The rumors about you and Mr. Andrews aren't true, then?" pursued Miss Biddle. "You aren't planning a separation? You aren't interested in anyone else?"

"I'm sure I can never care for anyone else again," Lily Trent said. "You might say that Mr. Andrews and I each need a certain amount of freedom. But, in our own way, we are happy together. I live so fully, you know"—Lily Trent laughed—"with my Hollywood home, my charities, my dear friends."

"You're going to stay in pictures?"

"Until my public grows tired of me," Lily Trent said. "I hope, at the first indication, I'll know enough to retire gracefully."

"That won't be for a long, long time," Alberta Biddle said.

Lily Trent rose, with the sweetest smile in the world.

"It was good of you to come," she said. "You are one of the few to whom I can reveal a little of my real self."

En route to her dull little apartment, Miss Biddle planned a new lead. Miss Trent had been far too wonderful for her to use that first stupid beginning. . . .

"The telephone rang while the white rabbit was here. Was it about the contract?" Lily Trent asked.

Sally shook her head.

"I don't know what I'll do if they don't take up the option," Lily said. "The picture is the only one they're planning that I could possibly be in. That wasn't Wayne who telephoned?"

"Of course not." Sally Mason's voice was sympathetic. "It was about evening gowns. Try to get some rest. I'll call you if anyone rings about the option—or if Mr. Andrews calls."

Suddenly Lily Trent slumped down at the table. She hid her face in her hands, so even Sally Mason couldn't see that she looked suddenly old.

"Get me some Scotch, like a good girl, Sally," she said. "I need it awfully. I haven't had a single drop today."

Then, as Sally Mason went out, Lily Trent plagiarized her sister Agnes.

"Oh, God!" she cried. "What am I going to do?"

OBSESSION

HE NEVER KNEW when it started. And certainly not how or why. One day he was calm. Well-adjusted. Devoted to his wife and his home. And the next thing he knew, he was in love with Shirley Clarke. It was as sudden as that.

All his life he had heard of men who fell in love with their stenographers. Married men who had affairs on the side. Or broke up their homes because of office amours. From his well-regulated and rather dignified life he had looked down on them as creatures from another world.

He was a quiet man, and conservative. And he was forty-four years old. His hair was still abundant, but it had thinned and receded a trifle at the hairline. His aquiline nose had thinned just a little, but his chin was strong and his throat line was firm, his profile good. He spent at least two and sometimes three of his lunch hours at a nearby athletic club, playing handball or doing fairly strenuous exercises, followed by a quick massage, and in summer he played golf and tennis. His stomach was flat and muscular. He always looked slim and well-groomed and fit.

He was not a conceited man, but he was proud of the progress he had made. Starting with nothing when he left college, he'd worked up to executive manager of one of the more important divisions of his firm, of which he was one of the vice-presidents. He worked hard, and his

work was important to him. He felt that, in time, he would go even farther.

He had met Laura Martin when he was twenty-five and she was nineteen. It was love at first sight with him. Not tumultuous, exciting, unsettling love, but a calmer and, he had felt, finer affection. She had loved him, too, and her love, too, had been fine and deep and calm.

He was getting along very nicely; then, so they had lived well from the start of their married life. Nothing to the way they lived now, of course, but Laura never had had to endure hardships or make sacrifices. Clint always had been glad of that, for Laura was accustomed to nice living. Her family was richer than his. She had been raised surrounded with every luxury.

Their life together had been pleasant, though not especially eventful, which was the way Clint had wanted it. In summer they lived in a house in Connecticut, which Laura's aunt had left them, but which they had had done over completely. A dignified house on the water's edge, with smooth and well-kept grounds. In winter they lived in a rather too-large apartment on Park Avenue. Among Laura's many good traits was the ability to keep servants. The old couple who lived in the house in Connecticut kept the place all ready for them, in case they wanted to run up for winter weekends. The servants in town were equally satisfactory, though now Laura thought only two were necessary. Helen, who had been with them for years, did the cooking and took care of the kitchen and dining room, and Flossie, pretty and a bit impudent, did everything else, save for a visiting laundress and a man who came in once a week for general cleaning.

Clint and Laura entertained with pleasant little dinners. They went with a quiet crowd, who felt above cafe society and seldom visited night clubs. They never went to first nights at the theater, but waited until a play was a decided

success before attending, buying seats from speculators a few days in advance. Their best parties were those that included the Gilfants—Mr. Gilfant was the president of Clint's firm—but the others were successful, too. They went to Europe on pleasant holidays, or contented themselves with the house in the country and the apartment in town.

Clint Palmer had been too old for the second world war, but he had made up for that by spending time on war loan drives. He'd given blood to the Red Cross. And he'd been to Washington half a dozen times on conferences concerning his particular industry.

Yes, life had been pleasant, smooth, regular. Laura was nice to be with. Good company. Laughing at the right things. Always well-groomed and as intent on keeping fit as he was. Interested in half a dozen pursuits of her own and yet interested in him, too. She played a good game of bridge. Read the most discussed books. The weekly news magazines and the more conservative columnists. Kept up with things. Clint had believed that he was still in love with Laura. He hadn't even thought of looking at another woman, save with impersonal and disinterested attention. Why, he was satisfied. Settled.

And then he fell in love with Shirley Clarke.

It wasn't Shirley Clarke's fault. He had to admit that. She did absolutely nothing about it. She won him neither by encouragement nor by pretended indifference and coyness.

She must have been pleased, in the beginning, to find that a man of Clint's standing paid any attention to her. She certainly never tried even to attract his attention. She had taken his interest, which she couldn't help but see, in her stride, and at first, with a sort of amused curiosity.

She wasn't even a beautiful girl. Or especially attrac-

tive or talented. That was the funny part of it. Through the years, Gilfant & Falconer had had dozens of stenographers who were prettier and brighter, and Clint Palmer had paid absolutely no attention to them. Shirley Clarke was small and slender, with a turned-up nose and quantities of blonde hair, which she didn't wear quite so primly as usually is prescribed for secretaries. Her clothes were discreet and inexpensive. Little ready-made tailored numbers, and funny little hats that looked like felt cups with bits of ornament fastened on the side. Just a stenographer!

Clint's own private secretary, a tall and correct woman, Miss Batson, who had left him unmoved and slightly annoyed by her elegance for years, was ill with influenza, and he had telephoned to the front office for a substitute.

Shirley Clarke appeared. In a blue skirt and a plaid blouse that was too bright for her piquant face.

"You sent for me?" she asked. It was a question, but Clint noticed that most of her statements rose at the end, as if they, too, were questions.

"Yes. Sit down, please," he said. And she sat down. And was very quiet, notebook in hand, while she waited.

It happened almost immediately. Almost at that very moment, though Clint didn't recognize it. He had a curious feeling of knowing this girl very well. And then a feeling of not knowing her at all, not so much as you know even casual acquaintances. What made her tick? What was she thinking about? What was she doing here? Where did she live when she went away?

"Are you new here?" he asked.

"I've been around a couple of months. In the front office?" Her voice went up into a question. But surely she wasn't asking a question. She knew she was in the front office. Two months. And he'd never seen her. Or felt her presence.

"Like it here?" He had to ask something.

"It's all right. My third job?" Again the question. Well, she ought to know if it was or not.

"What became of the other two?" Anything to keep her talking.

"The first one, a man was unpleasant and the hours were too long."

Poor little thing! Fighting against the world. He'd never felt any special sympathy for working girls.

"I see," he said. And then, "I'm glad you're with us, Miss, uh—"

"Clarke," she said. "Shirley Clarke. That name will date me, one of these days. A lot of Shirleys born around that time."

"Shirley Temple is still young, so you don't have to worry."

"Oh, yes. Shirley Temple?" As if she weren't sure of the name. He noticed that her voice was husky and wondered if she had a cold or if it was natural. He found out, later, that she always talked that way.

He dictated then, and she wrote smoothly, without asking unnecessary questions. Later, when she brought in the finished letters, he found they were neither better nor worse than average. A few errors. No serious ones. And neat typing. He looked at the letters for a long time. Just think—she'd hit the keys over and over again. For all those words! He'd never thought of that before.

He found himself making half a dozen unnecessary trips into the general office. Her desk was at one side. Not too near the window. And she was working intently, watching her machine, and picking away like mad. Poor little kid!

He was glad when Miss Batson's influenza lingered.

He watched for Shirley Clarke. Thought up a dozen extra letters during the day, so he could send for her. She

wore short skirts and sort of flipped them when she walked. Her legs were good and her heels high. Funny, after all this time, he had no idea what kind of legs Miss Batson had, though, being male, he was sure she'd tried in a dozen small ways to attract him.

Now all he wanted was to watch Shirley Clarke. To make her talk. To listen to the sentences that ended with a question mark. To watch the curve of her cheek.

"I've got it bad!" he told himself. And sort of smiled about it. It wasn't like him. And yet at first it was only mildly exciting and vaguely disturbing.

He couldn't have Batson back! Batson, so tall and sleek. He loathed her! Though he knew, to do her justice, he'd never felt the loathing before.

He had to have Shirley Clarke as his secretary. Safe, there, in his outer office. Where he could be near her all day long. The door open between them. She'd never know he always had insisted that Miss Batson keep the door closed.

Luckily for him, some important work came up and they were in the midst of it when Miss Batson telephoned that she'd be back on Monday.

He asked Miss Bliss, the office manager, to come in to see him. "I must keep Miss Clarke," he told her. "I'm in the middle of a difficult deal and it would take too long to explain details to anyone else."

"But Miss Batson always has handled your affairs. Wouldn't she—"

"She's very good," he said truthfully. "But Miss Clarke has taken hold very well."

"But Miss Clarke is very young. There are a number of girls who should get the raise first. She's never even been a private secretary. I just sent her in because we were busy. I was a little worried about sending her to you."

"Well, she is working out very well. I've decided to keep her."

"But Miss Batson—I don't know what to tell her."

"Send her in to Mr. McWilliams. He's always said he envied me Miss Batson. It will be a raise for her. He'll make her his assistant. She's quite capable of working independently on the work she'd have to do there."

"That's an idea," said Miss Bliss.

"It's what I had in mind, actually," he said. And didn't even care when Miss Bliss looked at him intently.

He had an excited, boyish feeling that he hadn't had in years and years. A day-before-Christmas feeling. Something wonderful happening. He had to bite his lip to keep from smiling. Shirley Clarke in his office. Where he could see her all the time.

Shirley seemed neither surprised nor pleased at the change. Maybe she didn't realize what a promotion it was for her. From a beginner in the outer office to her own office, and private secretary to a vice-president.

"Miss Bliss says I'm to work just for you?" she asked.

"That's right. They're making a few changes, and I suggested that, as long as you'd started with me—"

"She said I'm to stay right in here?"

"That's right. That's your desk. In there. And when I ring—" He explained the interoffice signals.

And there she was. Where he could see her any time he wanted to, just by shifting his chair a little. Where he could call her and bring her close to his side by pressing a button.

It was all he wanted. For a while, anyhow.

Laura noticed a change in him. "Working hard?" she asked.

"Moderately hard. Why?"

"You're nervous. Jumpy. Sort of absent-minded, as if you were someplace else most of the time."

He was someplace else. In the office! In his mind he was watching a little girl with blonde hair and a turned-up nose.

"You know how they pile work on us these days," he said. And tried to relax. And pay more attention to what Laura was saying to him.

He couldn't think of anyone but Shirley. He wasted hours watching her. He wondered if anyone at the office noticed anything. Yet he didn't do anything, actually. Nothing anyone could see, certainly.

It was an obsession. That's all there was to it. He'd heard about men falling in love with their secretaries and thought that the men were simple-hearted fools, who, after long hours of close companionship, had been vamped by the girls who worked for them. Now he found himself mouthing all the clichés he had despised. It is possible to love two women! He still loved Laura. But it was Shirley who needed him.

Shirley didn't need him, and he knew it. She seemed hardly aware of his existence. Maybe she thought of him as an old—well, anyhow, a middle-aged man. Maybe she didn't think of him at all. Actually he knew nothing of her home life. She might have a boy-friend. Or be married.

"Are you married?" he asked her, as casually as he could, as soon as he thought of that terrible possibility.

"No, I'm not married. Why?"

"I like to know about my secretaries."

"I'm not married?" she repeated. It was almost a question this time.

He wanted to hold her tight in his arms, bury his face in her hair. He knew how ridiculous he was. How disloyal to Laura. Oh, well, after all, he wasn't doing anything about it.

But there she was. Where he could see her.

He was glad when he found that she had been given a raise. He inquired about Miss Batson, and found that she was getting along very well indeed. He had to force himself to do most of the things he formerly had done almost without thinking. The things people classified as thoughtful. Flowers for Laura. Presents on anniversaries. He and Laura seemed to celebrate dozens of them.

He had to remember to be pleasant to people. And to keep his mind on a bridge game. To talk entertainingly—or at least listen attentively—when he was with Laura or when they were at those once so pleasant little dinner parties. He even had a hard time keeping his mind on a play.

He was completely bewitched. And he didn't know what to do about it. Nor did he want to do anything.

Sentimental songs began to have a new meaning. He found himself looking through old books of poems he hadn't glanced at in years. Romantic poems of another generation. Why, Shirley wouldn't understand them if he read them to her, though he had no intention of reading them to anyone. He bathed in their sentimentality, more vapidly than any schoolboy.

In business conferences he would find himself smiling vacantly, and realize he had been thinking about Shirley and had lost the thread of the discussion. He would shake his head, as if to dislodge her image from his brain. And he'd feel that it was more than his imagination that some of the men were looking at him curiously. How much did they know? Or imagine? He'd have to do something about it! But he did nothing at all.

When some unexpected work came up and he had to put in extra hours, he was delighted.

"I won't be home to dinner," he told Laura, and had to be careful to keep the joy out of his voice. Let her ask

the Gilfants! She'd find out soon enough that he really did have to work. He was like a boy let out of school—and Laura was his teacher. A kindly teacher, but one from whom it was a pleasure to escape.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to work tonight," he said to Shirley, and watched her face, to try to see whether disappointment at breaking an engagement or perhaps pleasure were there. He saw no expression at all.

"Yes?" she said. And that was all.

Everyone left the office around five. It grew dark. Shirley turned on the lights. Was it his imagination that she seemed pale? Perhaps he shouldn't allow her to work these long hours! He hadn't thought of that.

At seven they were nearly finished.

"Are you starved?" he asked.

"Hungry? Yes?"

"I should have thought of that hours ago. We'll run down and get a bite and come up and finish in no time at all."

"Wouldn't you rather finish now?"

"And have you fainting on my hands? No, we'll eat first."

He had been planning on that. Of course.

He chose the most expensive restaurant in the neighborhood. It was a quiet place. Discreet. With no music. But the food was excellent.

It was a new pleasure, seeing her across a restaurant table. She looked so small. And sweet.

"What about a cocktail?" he asked. "A very dry Martini?"

She nodded. And he didn't know if that meant she really wanted one and was accustomed to Martinis or was just accepting the drink politely because he had asked her.

When the cocktails arrived, she drank hers slowly, but she didn't make a face over it, so she must have been accustomed to them. Why, she wasn't a child! Why was

he always thinking of her as an infant? She was used to cocktails. She got around.

"What will it be?" he asked when she held a menu. When she hesitated, he said, "I'll order if you like," as eagerly as a boy. He felt a desire to show off, to exhibit his knowledge of food.

"Fine," she said. And he felt that she almost omitted the usual question mark.

She wasn't an especially adroit conversationalist. He missed Laura's parrying with words, the pseudo cleverness of his friends. Shirley evidently said what she thought, and her thoughts were clear and without depth or subtlety.

"She isn't sophisticated!" he told himself, as if this gave her a new charm.

The dinner was as good as he had hoped it would be. She ate with the relish of a child, but he thought that was more because she was hungry than because of any real appreciation of the food. She ate quickly, and her table manners were dainty, though he wished he could take his hands, and, holding them over hers, push the knife and fork into place. She grasped the fork too near the tines, the knife almost at the blade. It seemed childish, rather than an indication of bad manners.

Neither of them cared for dessert. Or at least Shirley said she didn't, and he scarcely ever took a sweet. After dinner was over and he'd paid the bill, he felt a new possession of her, as if this breaking of bread had formed a further intimacy.

Back in the office, they were in a world of their own. It required all his strength to keep from taking her in his arms. Not that he had any moral qualms about it. He was afraid of frightening her. Of driving her away from him. He couldn't do that! "Not yet," he told himself. As if that meant that one day—

They finished the work in no time at all. And went

down in the elevator together. He thought the night operator eyed him curiously.

"I'll take you home," he said.

"Nonsense!" she told him. "I'm often out alone later than this."

He didn't like to think of her being out alone. "Where do you live?" he asked.

"Way out. Near Jamaica."

He couldn't find an excuse, even to himself, to drive out there. Not yet! Again, to himself, that insistence that more was just ahead.

He called a taxicab, pressed a bill into her hand. "Don't try to be on time in the morning," he said. "I won't be." All night he tossed. Thinking of her.

"Eat your breakfast," Laura said. "You're staring at your plate as if you saw visions there. Isn't it all right?"

"Everything's fine," he said. "And you're a lamb. I've been working hard. And my eyes are tired. What about going to the theatre tonight? That ought to rest them."

They usually went to the theatre after more careful planning.

"We're going to the Wilsons for bridge and dinner. Don't you remember?"

"Of course I do! When I'm working—"

"You won't have to work tonight?"

"Heavens, no! Not for weeks, probably."

Not for weeks. That was true. Unless he could think of something.

Shirley was at work by the time he got there. He nodded crisply, every inch the executive.

"You got home all right, I see."

"Fine. I put the change on your desk."

"You oughtn't to have done that."

"Oh, I tipped the cab driver. This was left over."

She really was naive! He wanted to stay and talk with her. Forced himself to go on into his own office.

Only a week later he thought up the idea about the theater tickets.

"Look," he said. "I've two tickets to 'Little Lady.' I'd expected to take a client, but he won't be in town. Could you go with me?"

She hesitated until he felt himself growing nervous. "Why, yes," she said finally. "I've wanted to see that show, but it would be ages before I could get tickets for it. I'd—I'd love to go."

He told Laura he had a business engagement.

This time he took Shirley to a gayer restaurant. And insisted that she order. She chose roast beef with "I don't get much meat these days" as a reasonable explanation.

He had seen the play, but he didn't think it was necessary to tell her. She laughed at the brightest quips. And he hoped she saw that having an affair of the heart didn't actually harm a girl. But was that what he wanted her to believe? Did he want an affair? He didn't know what he did want, except to have her beside him.

In the lobby they talked over the play. And he was glad to notice that she kept her husky voice very low.

Afterward he took her to the Stork. And enjoyed pointing out a few celebrities. He asked her to dance and, for the first time, held her in his arms. How little she was! He hoped she thought he danced well.

He knew he was a fool. But after all, you live only once. He was—well, in his forties. And it seemed to him, now, that he had wasted too many of his years.

This time, there was no question about his escorting her home.

"It's very late. Will your parents be angry?"

"They may not even hear me. I have a key."

In the taxicab he drew her to him, and they sat with

his arm around her. What would a young boy who took her out do? He didn't want to be too forward. Frighten her. And yet, a younger man—

She lived in the third of a row of houses that were all alike. There was a light in the hall.

"They always leave that for me," she said.

He got out of the taxicab, helped her alight, followed her to the doorway. He took her in his arms.

She wasn't coy. She raised her mouth for his kiss.

How sweet she was! How very dear! Why, she was in his arms! He was kissing her! His girl.

Suddenly he felt very young. And almost frightened. And very happy.

"You—you darling!" he said. And held her close.

And finally he was in the taxicab again. And trembling.

This wasn't possible! This wasn't he, Clint Palmer. Conservative. Settled. What was he doing with his life? He closed his mind against it. He didn't want to know.

But he knew one thing. It was no problem at all to get away from home. To say you had a business engagement. To play hookey from school.

Three weeks later, with two more dinner-theater-night-club engagements behind him, he found that he had to go to Washington for two days. He never had taken a secretary, but the work was heavy enough to demand one.

"I think I'll take Miss Clarke," he said. "Then I'll be free from details."

No one argued with him. He wondered if anyone suspected anything. Or how much. Certainly they wouldn't question him. Did they whisper behind his back? He found himself shaking his head, as if to throw off the thought of it.

"We're going to Washington," he told her, as casually as he could. And let her make the arrangements, so she would know it was a legitimate business trip.

The day of the trip they both went to the office. There were a dozen details to arrange before traintime.

He wondered what the other passengers thought. Did people think they were married? Or, by some horrible chance, that she was his daughter? Or that they were lovers?

Their rooms, at the hotel where his firm always took accommodations, were on the same floor but not adjoining. They went to their rooms, freshened up. Went at once to a long business conference. Clint was glad when he saw that two other secretaries were present.

He had dinner with a business acquaintance, didn't get back to the hotel until late. And was furious at himself because this had had to happen. He had visualized the evening with Shirley.

He called her on the house telephone. "May I come in and say good-night?" he asked.

"Why—" she hesitated—"why, yes."

She had on a long-sleeved, green negligee. Somehow, he was glad she seemed surprised that he had called.

"I'm sorry about this evening," he said. "I wanted to have dinner with you."

"I knew you were tied up," she said. "After all, that's what you came here for, wasn't it? I got some magazines. I didn't want to go to a movie alone in a strange town."

He gathered her in his arms. To his amazement he found that he was trembling. And more bashful than any school-boy.

This couldn't go on! He told himself that, after he was back in New York. Seeing Shirley on the sly. Thinking about her. Why, he wasn't himself! It was ridiculous. If anyone had told him a year ago, six months ago, that he'd be such a sap! Yet here he was. But he couldn't keep it up. His life was all in bits. Like a carefully put together picture puzzle that a child sweeps onto the floor.

What could he do? He asked himself that a hundred times a day. In the office. At home. Walking on the street.

Laura no longer asked him what was wrong. But she looked at him the way someone looks at you if you are ill.

And then one morning Shirley didn't come to work!

The office was as lonely as if everyone in the place were away. He needed a stenographer, but he hesitated to ask Miss Bliss to send someone.

Was she ill? Funny she didn't telephone. He asked the operator, who couldn't find the number he wanted.

It was Miss Bliss who finally came to him. "You need a new secretary, I see," she said.

He waited. He didn't want to say anything, though he wanted to ask if Shirley had telephoned. If she were ill—

"There's Miss Baker, who used to be in Mr. Kelland's office. She's a very nice girl. Shall I send her in?"

"Yes, if you like."

He waited. Miss Bliss waited.

She didn't say anything else about the one thing in which he was interested until she was standing up, ready to leave.

"Were you surprised to lose Miss Clarke?" she asked.

"Why—why, yes."

"She certainly didn't give adequate notice that she was quitting. Those girls are all alike. You give them an opportunity and they don't appreciate it."

"I know," he said. And hoped he nodded with the proper degree of dignity.

After she left he sat down, heavily, at his desk. And he felt like an old man. Shirley had left without even telling him. She was gone.

Miss Baker, the new secretary, came in, and he spoke pleasantly enough to her. "I'll do some dictating later," he

said. "I'll buzz when I want you. I like to keep the door closed between our two offices."

She was a colorless girl, with sandy hair. Tall and awkward-looking. Undoubtedly an excellent secretary. All the girls Miss Bliss hired were excellent secretaries.

He never knew how the day passed. He remembered, vaguely, going to lunch. And even dictating to Miss Baker.

He telephoned Laura. "I won't be home to dinner," he said.

"A business date, I suppose?" Was there sarcasm in her voice?

"Why, yes. Of course. Don't—don't wait up for me."

"I shan't. Not if you're late."

Finally the business day was over. He had forced himself to stay at his desk.

He got into a taxicab. Found that he was sitting tense, unable to relax.

This would have to stop! He'd have to come to some decision. Marry Shirley? And give up Laura forever? Even that, if he had to do it.

Did Shirley leave in order to force his hand? She didn't seem that sort. But you never know about girls. He didn't understand her at all. He knew that. Now, Laura was understandable. But Shirley—you never knew where you were with her. Or what she was thinking about. You held her in your arms, and she was as great a puzzle as if you'd never seen her. Oh, well! He'd find out now. She'd have to put her cards on the table.

It was a long ride, out to Jamaica. It seemed much longer now. And she'd taken this trip on the subway every day. Maybe she was ill. Or too tired to work any more. Yet she seemed strong enough.

He was there at last. He'd seen the house only late at night. He'd never been inside.

He rang the bell. A pretty woman, too fat, but not old, came to the door. Behind her was a thin man, nearly bald, in his shirt sleeves.

He asked for Shirley. "I'm her boss. At Gilfant & Falconer. I'm—"

"Oh, of course! I'm Shirley's mother. Come right in."

Her father smiled. Said, "Take off your overcoat."

"Will Shirley be home soon?" he asked.

"I don't think so," Mrs. Clarke said. And then: "Well, you might as well know. Shirley's getting married. Tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!" He echoed the word.

"Yes. She said she didn't want anyone at the office to know. She doesn't like to fuss over things. Bill's got a furlough. And then he's going to Florida for special training. We're pretty proud of him."

She took a picture from a table, handed it to him. A lean boy in uniform.

"Has she known him long?" he heard himself ask, as if the words belonged to someone else.

"Oh, sure. For years. But she's young. I wasn't in any hurry to have her get married. But now he comes back and says if they get married she can go with him while he's taking special training. She can go to Florida. It will be nice for Shirley. We've never been able to let her go any place like that."

"Is Shirley an only child?"

"Oh, no. Two brothers. Both in service. Didn't she tell you?"

"No, she doesn't discuss her affairs much in the office."

"I guess that's right. She doesn't bring office chatter home, either. She's an odd child. The last one at home. We'll miss her."

"Yes, we'll certainly miss her," said Shirley's father. "A good girl. She didn't go out much while Bill was away."

Nearly always around the house except the nights she had to work."

"We'll miss her at the office, too," said Clint, with, he hoped, the right amount of politeness.

"Yes, I guess she was a real good worker," said Mrs. Clarke. "When that girl puts her mind to anything—"

He tried to say all the right things. And finally he found himself outside.

It was over. Shirley was getting married. To a boy named Bill he never had heard of. She never had loved him at all! Not that she ever had said she had.

He had dismissed the taxicab, and he didn't know how to find the subway. He walked to the corner.

There was a drugstore. He went in, called his home.

Flossie answered the telephone. "Mrs. Palmer is out," she said. "Yes, sir, she'll be out for dinner. No, she didn't say what time she'd be back."

Was there something odd about Flossie's voice? Or was he imagining things?

Where was Laura? Was she making engagements the nights he wasn't at home? Was there someone else—someone Laura cared about?

He got a taxicab finally. And huddled into a corner of it. And felt very old.

The picture puzzle really was knocked to pieces now. And he didn't much care if he could put the pieces together. Shirley was gone. Forever. He knew that. But he never had had her. He had had, in a way, just a semblance of a girl. A girl who, he knew now, never had been herself with him.

Had she used him as a stopgap, as someone to help pass the time, while she waited for Bill? She never had tried to appeal to him. He knew that. He had made all the moves. And she never had cared. Not at all.

It was over. Shirley was gone. He told himself that a thousand times before he reached home.

He let himself in with his key. The maids had gone out or had gone to bed. No one had left a light in the hall for him. He had to smile about that.

He turned on the lights in the living room. Played the piano, which he did badly. Turned on the television first, and then the radio. And tried to read.

It might be hours before Laura came home. And when she did come—

Maybe Laura had someone else. Then he would have no one at all. Not that he deserved anyone.

He felt completely empty, as if he'd had a major operation. And yet, in a way, he knew that Shirley—not the real Shirley, probably, but the girl he had imagined—was still with him. In a way, the obsession was still there.

How would Laura act? How would she treat him—if she knew?

Suddenly he knew, and clearly, that his life, and his life with Laura, depended on how she acted. Laura, who always had been so fair. Fair, but cold, too. A dignified and even beautiful coldness, not the warmth that a man needs. That he needed now. And if Laura cared for someone else—

He tried to reconstruct Laura, the Laura of the past few weeks. But he couldn't. He hadn't paid enough attention to her. He'd been too busy with his own affairs. Too wrapped up in himself.

He didn't deserve Laura. Or Laura's love—even the quiet understanding she always had given him. But who wants, ever, what he deserves? He wanted more. So very much more. He needed so much.

He threw himself on the couch. And tried to think. But knew only that he was waiting. For Laura. Funny. When

all these weeks it had been Shirley. And now Shirley was gone. And he was waiting.

He heard Laura's key. He stood up. He wanted to rush toward the door. But he waited, very quietly.

"Why, you're home!" Laura said.

"I've been home for ages."

"If I'd known! I could have been home before."

No word of where she'd been.

She went toward him, and he was trembling.

"You look tired," she said. Her voice was gentle. "A hard day?"

"A very hard day," he said. And his voice broke. "Oh, Laura, a very hard day!"

She looked at him. Now! He'd find out! For his whole life. If it was over. If—

"Goodness!" she said. "You must have been through things! What about a milk punch? That used to straighten you out."

"Fine! You'll have one with me?"

"Sure. I guess I need one, too."

"Shall I mix it?"

"You're tired. You rest."

He let her go into the kitchen. He felt numbed.

She was back in no time with two tall, foaming drinks. They drank, then put their half-finished drinks on the table.

"That's good," he said. "I needed it. I've been through a lot."

"Have you?" asked Laura. She looked at him. Through him. Laura wasn't dumb. Laura knew.

"Oh, my dear!" he said and went to her. "I've been—well, bewitched. Obsessed. I think that was it. I must have been hard to put up with."

"You have been rather a mess," said Laura, and smiled.

"I'm back now. If you'll have me. Not worth much,

maybe. But you know about salvaging. Maybe, with your help, if you think I'm worth it, we can exorcise the evil."

Now, if she only didn't ask questions—if, by some miracle, she understood.

"Didn't you know," said Laura, "that's one of my specialties? Exorcising spirits. I'm afraid you don't appreciate all my talents."

Why, this was Laura. The old Laura. Whom he loved. If only—

She was in his arms. She was warm and friendly. More than friendly. And not cold or dignified at all.

He held her close. Buried his head in her smooth, shining hair.

"My, but you smell nice!" he said. And meant a million things more.

RUDOLPH

WHEN ALEX TELEPHONED that he'd be late for dinner Betty gave the children their supper—they had their dinner at noon—bathed them, and put them to bed. She knew Alex liked to play with them when he came home, but they had been running out of doors all day, the month was May, and they'd be pretty cross if they stayed up.

After she had tucked them in and kissed them good night she finished getting dinner. She had sort of got into the habit of having some of the same things the children had at noon—without the custards and the purées. It's pretty hard, when you're doing your own work, to get dinner twice a day. The children couldn't eat dinner at night, and Alex couldn't come home at noon. Even as it was, the firm kept him pretty late once or twice a week.

She went into the bathroom to wash up a bit. She thought that wives made an awful mistake letting themselves go and she always liked to put on fresh powder and a bit of lipstick before Alex got in.

There, on the edge of the tub, sat a ghost!

Maybe if it hadn't been a masculine ghost and she hadn't found it in the bathroom, she wouldn't have been so awfully embarrassed. But there it sat, apparently quite at ease.

At first glance, when she turned on the light—it had been early enough, when she bathed the children, so that

she hadn't needed a light and there'd been no one in the bathroom, then—she thought a thief had got in. She wanted to scream, but something held her back—neither cowardice nor bravery—a desire not to wake the children. When you once get them to sleep—

It stood up—and she saw it wasn't a thief! It was dressed fairly well, in a soft shirt and a dark, neat suit and it was slim and not tall. And when she looked at it steadily it had a sort of transparent quality. You couldn't exactly see through it, but it reminded Betty of a sort of thick gelatin that hadn't quite got firm. And there it stood and sort of smiled.

"What—what do you want?" Betty asked. Her voice wasn't steady.

"I'm a ghost," said the ghost, as if that explained everything.

"I see you are," said Betty. "What do you want here, I mean?"

"I was sent here," said the ghost.

"To—to haunt?" Betty asked.

The ghost nodded a bit sadly.

"You can't haunt here," Betty said. "My husband wouldn't like it. He—he doesn't believe in ghosts. And there are the children—"

"The children won't mind," the ghost said. "They never do. I can't help about your husband. He'll get used to me. I was sent here to haunt and here I stay."

"I think you've got the wrong place," said Betty. "This is a new house. It's only three years old. We bought it the year Junior was born. Don't ghosts haunt old places? You weren't killed on the premises—while the house was being built? They never told us anything."

"Oh, no, I wasn't killed here. They just gave me this house."

"Who gave it to you?" Betty was getting a bit indignant.

"The union. It's all divided up. Most of the ghosts haunt in England and Ireland—and there's quite a good union in Italy. But I'm an American and we have to stay in our own territory."

"But why do you have to haunt this little house? I think it's the silliest thing!"

"I don't like it any too well myself," the ghost agreed. "But times being what they are, I took what I could get." He sighed.

"But you don't have to stay in the bathroom!"

"No, but it was nice and warm here. You had the heater on and the rest of the house was sort of cold."

"Yes, it's cool for May. The children's room was warm until after I got them in bed. I always open the windows, then."

"I know. But I don't come on until dark. Union hours. I'm off at daybreak. I used to wait for cockcrow, but no one around here keeps chickens."

"It's against the law," Betty explained.

"I know. I used to live in the suburbs myself. We had some of the best times—"

"I'm afraid I haven't time to listen," said Betty. "You'll have to excuse me. My husband will be home any minute. Do you know Mr. Redmond? He's very conventional. Too conventional for his own comfort, I sometimes think. And if he finds you here in the bathroom with me, Heaven knows what he'll think."

"I'll go in the other room," the ghost said, politely. "I'll be in the living room." He oozed over to the door.

"Do you have to stay long?" Betty asked.

"Until they get me another place. Most likely all summer."

"You can't do that!" said Betty. "What would the neighbors say! We're just getting in with some of the nicest people."

"Maybe you could persuade them it was stylish," the ghost offered. "It is, in England. A castle that's properly haunted is worth a lot of money. And I do a really first-class piece of work. Always on the job. No fadeaways when you're looking for me." He was eager, now.

"No," said Betty. "It will never do. Mrs. Stook, she's the leader of things around here and she only thinks things are stylish if she sees them at the Theater Guild or in smart magazines. She isn't being haunted, too, is she?"

"No, this is the only house around here that I know of."

"Oh, dear," sighed Betty, "then you'd better try to stay out of the way."

She just had time to powder her face and smooth her hair when she heard Alex at the door.

"Yoooo hoooo," he called, brightly.

"Hello, darling," said Betty, her voice low.

"What's the matter, dear? Tired?"

"A—a little." She looked around. Maybe she had imagined the whole thing. But no, there in the chair Aunt Emma had given them for Christmas, that didn't quite go with anything else, the ghost sat.

Betty groaned.

"What's the matter, honey? Aren't the children all right?"

"The children are fine. Nothing the matter. Only—only we've got a guest. We're—we're being haunted." Betty, in a sort of introduction, motioned toward the rose-colored chair.

Alex smiled, then looked annoyed. Then he peered into the chair, jumped back.

"My God!" he screamed.

"Don't take it so hard," Betty pleaded. "It's all right. Very stylish in England. He's quite nice!"

"My God!" Alex repeated. "Don't you see! In that chair!"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," she said. "Yes, it's a ghost. He'll be here for some time."

She smiled at the ghost. Might as well make the poor fellow feel at home.

"This is my husband, Mr. Alex Redmond," she said.

The ghost got to his feet. "Pleased to meet you," he said. "Sorry I can't shake hands. My name is Rudolph—no, I'm sorry, Ma'am, the last name is Schmidt. I've been telling your missus I was sent here on this haunting job—"

"I see," said Alex.

Rudolph didn't eat, so there was dinner enough for Alex and Betty. Alex didn't have much of an appetite, but Betty felt quite hungry.

"I'm sorry you can't join us," she said to Rudolph.

"Oh, don't bother about me," he said. "I'll look at these magazines and then mosey around. You won't mind me—won't even see me—after a while. I don't stay in sight all the time. I just thought that, until you got used to me—Wouldn't you like me to do the dishes? I've always liked kind of puttering around a kitchen."

Betty hesitated, looked at Alex.

"Might as well let him, as long as he's here," Alex said.

Rudolph washed the dishes very nicely. He washed out the tea towels and hung them up to dry. Then he seemed to ooze out, for he didn't come back into the living room and they didn't notice him when they went to bed.

"Wasn't that the damndest thing!" said Alex. "Maybe we had indigestion or the house got too hot—"

"Shhhhh," said Betty. "You'll hurt his feelings!"

A few nights later "Born to Millions," with April Morning as the star, was playing at the Palace Theater, on Grove Street.

"I'd love to go," said Betty, "but there's no use going to the expense of having Mrs. Wrench in. A dollar an

hour and pouting if we're five minutes late and drinking up the gin if you don't lock it up."

A voice spoke from the other end of the living room.

"Say, what about letting me watch the children? No one will come near 'em while I'm around. And they both like me. Children are pretty good about ghosts."

"Might as well," said Alex. "It's the damnedest thing! But as long as he's here—"

The children were cozy and sound asleep when they got home.

They had been rather tied to the house. Now they went to the movies twice a week. They couldn't afford more than that, anyhow. And they were able to accept invitations, too, when they got them.

Rudolph watched the children, reported on everything.

"The telephone rang at nine. I didn't answer it. Junior wanted a drink and then I told him to go right to sleep again and he did. I put down the window a little when it started to rain."

Rudolph washed the dishes every night. He cleaned the house after they had gone to bed. He wasn't around in the day time, which Alex thought was just as well. A woman alone in the house with a masculine ghost—

They were afraid, always, that someone would find out about Rudolph. How could they explain? What could they say? If they said anything it would mark them as sort of queer, apart. Outside of that, things couldn't have been better. Rudolph did his haunting so unobtrusively, did so many generous things, that Betty grew awfully fond of him. The children adored him—wouldn't go to bed until he got there, which made things pretty hard as the days grew longer.

"I hurried just as fast as I could," he explained. "It didn't start getting dark until late and then they called a conference."

"Anything serious?" asked Betty.

"No, just about the rules. Ghosts working out of hours in the wrong territory. When you see a bunch coming out of a night club, even if you're off work, it's the hardest thing not to do something about it."

"I can imagine it would be," said Betty.

Friends of the Redmonds began asking questions. Did they have a new maid? With all their talk of hard times and economy! And who was that Betty was talking with when Mrs. Martin passed? It was before Alex Redmond came home because she saw him get off the train. And leaving those darling children alone at all hours—

When Mrs. Stook grew curious, it seemed about time to do something. So, one night when the crowd was standing in front of the Grove Street Palace and someone said something, Betty grew desperate.

"The house is haunted," she said. "And the ghost they sent to haunt us is a perfect darling. He does the work of three maids and takes care of the children—and hasn't broken a thing but that old red saltcellar since he came."

"Doesn't she say the funniest things!" the crowd laughed.

"Come home with us and I'll show you," Betty offered.

Alex started to say something, changed his mind. "Yes," he said, finally, "I wish you would!"

They trooped up the steps of the little house, waited for Alex to unlock the door, went into the living room.

Betty ran up to see how the children were. They were sound asleep, their mouths nicely closed.

"Rudolph!" she called. "Rudolph!" There was no answer. Usually she found him here, waiting for her.

She went into the other rooms upstairs, into the bath-room. Rudolph wasn't in sight. Gee, she hoped he wasn't afraid of company. Slowly she went downstairs.

The crowd was laughing.

"Well, you folks certainly do arrange a good story!" someone said.

"What do you mean?" Betty asked.

"As if you didn't know! That story about the ghost and then this note planted for us. That certainly worked out smooth!"

"What note?"

"Oh, don't act so innocent!" Someone thrust a paper into her hand.

The writing was slightly illiterate, painstaking.

Dear Mrs. Redmond,

I'm sorry I couldn't wait and tell you good-bye, but they took me off the job and no time to lose. The children always sleep through the evening and I knew you'd be home early. You was right—they made a mistake in the house. It was Tenth Street, Grove Park, New Jersey, and not Grove Park, Long Island. I'll miss you all a great deal. Love to the children and my best to Mr. Redmond. You certainly was kind to me and gave me a real home. I'd appreciate it if you could drop around to the new address.

Yours truly,

Rudolph Schmidt.

"You folks are clever!" "That was good!" they laughed.

Betty, looking at their faces, wanted to scream at all of them, wanted to say, "Get out! Go home!" She thought of the dishes and the cleaning, of the long hours she'd have to spend at home. More than that. Why, Rudolph was worth the whole bunch of them. And she had been afraid to let them know! And now he was gone!

"Yes, we're pretty funny," she said.

TECHNIQUE

WHEN THEY CAME into the Stork Club, all the regulars who dined there—celebrities in their own right, or relatives or friends of celebrities, and the thin sprinklings of the rich and uncelebrated who came to look at celebrities—turned to stare at them. This was a triumph. Most diners at the Stork Club felt themselves too important to look at anyone else.

Zara Evans and Kent Crane were high on the success ladder. They were suave and cool. They smiled and nodded to their friends. Sherman Billingsley had greeted them, and now they were given the best table in the Cub Room—a reward for accomplishment. Zara and Kent stopped a moment to chat with Walter Winchell and Dorothy Kilgallen, knowing they would be mentioned in their columns. They said “How are you?” to Morton Downey, and Igor Cassini, and J. Edgar Hoover, seated at nearby tables—not, of course, waiting to find out how they were.

Zara waved away the menu. She allowed herself orange juice to accompany Kent’s very dry Martini, clams while he had a thick soup, two lamb chops and spinach while he dined on a mixed grill and a huge baked potato and hot rolls on which he piled good sweet butter. Zara had dieted for so long it never occurred to her that her

eating habits were unusual—when you're in the theater you have to look well.

Zara Evans did look well. Near perfection. She might have passed for one of the modern mannequins in a Fifth Avenue shop window, and she knew she was undoubtedly being sized up for a fashion column. She sat very straight, her chin up. She wore her dark hair smooth, brushed back from her brow. The color on her lips and fingertips was so light that, from a distance, she seemed to wear no make-up. Closer, you saw the results of the skill with which she'd applied brown to her eyebrows, a shadow of blue above her eyes, a thin elongation of black to the corners of her eyes. Her face seemed to shine slightly, as if she were powderless, the result of an expensive lotion. Her gown was black and skillfully molded to accentuate the curves of her warmly slender figure, her mink stole forming a flattering background. She wore a single strand of pearls that were obviously real.

"Quite a crowd," said Kent. Zara smiled across the table at him. She liked the way he looked—everything about him. His tweed suit was just unpressed-enough-looking; his shoulders were broad; his hair, slightly tinged with gray, wasn't quite smooth. He ate what he liked and yet his figure was only slightly heavier than it had been when they were married, fourteen years ago. He looked hearty, immensely fit, masculine.

Fourteen years! It didn't seem possible. Fourteen years of being one of Broadway's successful couples. There weren't many of them—Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt, Katharine Cornell and Guthrie McClintic, Betty Field and Elmer Rice, Dorothy Stickney and Howard Lindsay, Moss Hart and Kitty Carlisle.

Each year Kent wrote a play for her. A Kent Crane play in which Zara Evans starred—and produced by Vincent Grey.

Now, was everything as smoothly beautiful as it had been all those fourteen years? Was she imagining things? She looked at the faces around her. Were they looking at her with a new curiosity? Were they wondering what she knew?

"What's the matter?" Kent asked.

"Thinking!"

"People get into trouble for less."

"My thoughts aren't dangerous. These same people—as if they were painted on the walls."

"That's an ideal. Paint them on, and then, if they don't come in, no one will know the difference."

This wasn't what she wanted to talk about. This was the way you talked to a casual acquaintance! Were they just pretending to be a devoted couple, so much in love? What was the truth? What did people know?

It was only recently that she knew. Kent was interested in another woman! Oh, he'd been interested in girls before, but the interest had been harmless froth. This was different. All of the things she'd read—and played and heard—when a husband wandered. First, Kent had been indifferent, his mind somewhere else. And then he actually was somewhere else! Their lives were such that Zara knew when he wasn't near—physically, spiritually. Zara had never felt the need of anyone else. Her home and the theater and Kent were enough. The perfect triangle. Planning, so that the house ran smoothly; little dinners and supper parties; and being interested in Kent's plays, and acting in Kent's plays. They both knew that she had a lot to do with Kent's dialogue.

"You know how people talk," he said. "I only know what I want them to say." He knew how to build to a climax, and she knew how to act in his plays. Was this perfect partnership going to break up? Without Kent she'd be nothing at all—a faded has-been. No other playwright

would bother about her. More than that, without Kent her world would crumble. She loved him so much—more than when they'd first fallen in love.

"How are your chops?" he asked.

"Very good. And your dinner?"

"Excellent! But if I wrote this, we'd both be out of work."

"How horrible if we talked in epigrams!" They both laughed at that. Maybe there was nothing . . .

She knew better. Kent had always liked playing bridge with men, and going to clubs, and going on holidays—fishing in Florida or camping in Maine. Being boyish and masculine at the same time. But now he came home late at night and acted sheepish and guilty. He was living in a world of his own, and she knew he wasn't living there alone.

They talked and smiled, an attractive, successful couple. Kent had a gooey piece of pastry and Zara had a fruit compote and coffee, and Kent had a liqueur.

A director stopped at their table.

"How's the new play going?" he asked.

"I'm thinking of taking up bricklaying."

"That means it's good. The boys who talk about masterpieces do the worst plays."

Five minutes of theater conversation. Zara loved it. But her mind raced on. Here was Kent—acting just the same. This was all she had—the theater and Kent. And Kent, most of all.

The director left, and Kent paid his bill, tipping just enough so the waiter wouldn't think he was an easy mark. Wonderful Kent!

They had almost reached the door when Kent stopped and talked to a girl who had just come in. And the way he spoke—Zara knew! To anyone who didn't know Kent it might have been an ordinary meeting, a man speaking

to a girl. Zara walked ahead, and waited quietly, and watched Kent. And watched others, who saw them. It was almost as if they'd met by appointment! A different Kent, leaning close, so as not to miss a word. And a girl laughing up into his eyes!

The girl was pretty, in a silly way. A snub of a turned-up nose. Eyes wide apart. That meant she'd photograph well. A rounded little chin. Hair too blond. Her figure was hidden by a bright green sports coat, but Zara knew that a girl with that head and those legs would have a good figure. And she was horribly and disgustingly young. So young she probably never even thought about her age. Zara worried every day about youth going—a wrinkle, an extra pound, an intonation. She had to keep her youth to keep success—to keep Kent. And this girl was young without even trying!

"Who was that pretty girl?" she asked Kent when he joined her, forcing a tolerant and understanding smile.

"I don't think you've met her," said Kent casually. "She was in Ralph Ingham's summer stock company. I saw her do the young girl's part in 'Personal Appearance.' She was very good. Kids have a hard time, today, in the theater."

"They certainly do!" said Zara. She'd had a hard time too, bit parts and one-night stands and horrible little rooms in third-rate hotels, and sneaking in food in paper bags.

Very calmly they walked out and into a taxi. The successful playwright and his successful star wife.

"It's as if I were acting in one of Kent's plays," Zara told herself. "Scene One. Only, I don't like it. I don't like it at all!"

What do you do if your husband is in love with another woman? Especially if you love him more than all the rest of the world put together!

Zara had played the part often enough, had read it a thousand times. Lying in her modern bed in her elegant bedroom—it reproduced well in the magazines—she listened for the sound of Kent coming home. Jealousy floated over her, burned into her. She wanted to scream, to claw the comforter. Those two—going to all the places she and Kent used to go, laughing at the things they used to laugh at! Or new things! Or at her—getting older every day!

Kent—her husband, her playwright, her protector, her rock. Her whole world would laugh! People are none too kind—only polite and suave and cringing when you're on top. Full of compliments because she was a star. If another woman stepped in, she'd be a has-been—back to bit parts here and there . . .

Oh, she'd saved something. This house in the East Sixties was in her name. But she couldn't afford it alone. Kent! Kent!

In stories and plays it was easy enough for the wife to win back her husband. All she had to do was to diet and exercise and do her hair a new way and learn to talk about things that interested him. But Zara had dieted for years, she had a massage every day, her hair styling was copied by thousands, and she always talked about things that interested Kent. And, now, she didn't nag nor complain; tried to act as if everything were all right.

"I must be a good actress," she told herself. "This is the hardest role I've ever played."

She learned about the girl without even trying to. Her name was Jo-Anne McKensev, and she came from Detroit. So even her little-girl-from-the-country air wasn't quite the real thing. That showed how clever she was! She'd been in New York three years, so she wasn't such a kid. She had modeled a little, and had clerked, before Christmas, in a department store.

Kent was completely enthralled. He'd work on his play

in his study. It was comforting to hear the tapping of his typewriter. He did his own first draft and then sent the pages to a typist. But as soon as he'd finished for the day, he was on his way. Oh, if Zara gave a party, he was there—the perfect host! And he took her to parties—the perfect escort. But it was as if he were playing a part too, and the rest of the time he wasn't there.

They'd had dinner at Twenty-one, greeting friends from Hollywood, and New Yorkers too—all successful, rich, more than a bit self-satisfied. Then they'd come home, and she'd gone to bed, and she'd heard Kent's door close. So he was going out—again!

And then there was a knock at her door! And it was Kent! And he wasn't out at all! The thrill of having him there made her throat feel as if she'd swallowed bubbles mixed with feathers.

"Here's the play," he said. "All done! Pretty rough, of course. Want to see it?"

"You know I do! Has it got a good part for me?"

"What do you think? Even if you do criticize—"

"I pretty my parts up a bit. You know I'm a ham!"

"This play has a new angle, I think," said Kent, "and there are three big parts and a lot of small roles." Kent was famous for his small roles. "Perfect vignettes," "Tiny etchings," "Complete psychological sketches," the critics called them. Would Jo-Anne get one of those?

"I'll read it right away."

"Don't judge it too severely!" He was embarrassed. "It's in a bigger mess than usual. If you'll help with the dialogue—and by the time the director and Vince get busy—"

"You're not going to direct?" He'd directed his last play.

"I don't think so. It was fun, but I'm a writer, not a director moving puppets around."

This was like old times—Kent bringing her his manu-

script. She could be generous if there was a tiny part for the cutie-pie.

Kent left, and Zara pulled the covers up around her, put on her glasses.

At first, she thought the role of Cynthia had been written for her. But Cynthia was a very young girl. That meant that Laura was her role. The third important character was a young man. Laura was middle-aged, muddle-headed—and in love with the young man.

It couldn't be! But she'd read Kent's ragged manuscripts before. It was a triangular story, with two women—one young and attractive, the other neurotic and middle-aged—fighting for the young man. At first he is grateful, because she helped him with his career. Then he and the young girl fall in love. And in the big third-act scene the young girl begs the woman to give up the young man. The older woman tries to fight back, knowing that the man is all she has—her happiness and what is left of her youth are dependent on the young man. The girl shows her that she is sacrificing the young man, the older woman gives him up, and the young lovers go away together. And the older woman is alone.

"It's horrible!" Zara told herself. "I'd be exposing my middle age, my inability to hold a man. Of course, the young man in the play isn't Kent. Kent is my age. But, outside of that— Oh, God, what shall I do!"

If she refused to do the play, Kent might walk out on her and get someone else to play the older woman. She knew how Kent felt about his plays. Vincent Grey had already raised the money, was waiting to go into production. He'd never turned down one of Kent's plays. Other actresses had made a success of playing middle-aged roles—playing such parts as Tennessee Williams' neurotic women. This part was different—it was unsympathetic,

without color or right emotion. All of the interest was with the young girl, who wanted, so badly, the man she loved. How could Kent do this to her!

She threw a dressing gown over her shoulders, went to Kent's room. She couldn't make a scene! And talking wouldn't do a bit of good. She knew how conceited Kent was about anything he wrote, and this time . . . She must say something . . .

She knocked on the door. There was no answer. She knocked again. Then, in a kind of panic, she opened the door. The room was dark. She switched on the light. Kent had gone out! Mingled, now, with the emotion about the play, was the old, hot, bitter jealousy.

Back in her room, she tossed in the darkness and tried to pray. She loved Kent so—wanted him to love her again. And she wanted success, too. One of the reasons Kent had loved her was because of her success in his plays. The two of them, together . . .

The next thing she knew, the sunlight was shining in streaks through the Venetian blinds. She tiptoed into the hall. Kent's door was open, his bed had been slept in. Either he was at breakfast or he'd already gone out.

At her dressing table, with the shades up, she knew she was definitely middle-aged. There were violet shadows under her eyes, faint lines around her eyes and mouth, and her skin was curiously unelastic. Already she'd had all the expensive beauty treatments she knew about. She'd taken gland pellets and injections—to give her energy—though her doctor knew it was appearance and not energy that mattered. She made up carefully, brushing on a lipstick that counterfeited youth; made up her eyes so they would not look hard in the morning light. Youth! Youth! Why was it so important? Why wasn't there, instead, a

reward for living? In China, she'd heard, old age is looked up to. But she wasn't in China.

Kent was in the breakfast room. Zara sat down across from him and prayed her pale flame-colored negligee was as becoming as she'd hoped it would be when she bought it. For Kent's approval.

"Sleep well?" he asked, after the usual good mornings.

"Very well," she lied. "And you?"

"I always sleep well, you know. Read the play?" He was ill at ease. And there was a smoldering anger—a symptom she knew well. Zara didn't want fireworks.

"Yes, I read it," she said brightly.

"Like it?"

"It's got something. As you said, it needs working on." She hoped her voice was smooth. "Have you thought about the cast? For the older woman I thought maybe Margalo Gilmore or Edna Best—"

"Are you crazy?" His laugh held a sneer. "You hadn't planned to play a girl of twenty?"

"Why, no. I guess I took it for granted—it seemed the star part." She prayed silently under the words.

"The other woman is the part for you."

"She seemed unsympathetic—"

"Not if you play it! You can get the audience in tears when you're left alone in the end."

She didn't want sympathy. But Kent's eyes were cold. She nodded, as if accepting the whole thing. Kent looked relieved, as if he'd expected an argument.

"You'll be great, as usual." His voice was smug.

"Have you thought of the others?" She held her hands together under the table.

He mentioned people for the smaller roles—a silly old lady, a bartender, a girl and a man from the wrong side of the tracks who try to impress each other—all for the

barroom scene. He didn't mention Jo-Anne McKensey. Could she have been wrong?

"Vince thought of Lawrence Denvers for the male lead," Kent said. "He's done some good things; young, and doesn't mouth his words."

"He sounds like the kind of man women might fight over." She thought Denvers rather a cheap-looking actor. "Who have you in mind for the girl?"

He dropped his eyes. Maybe he just wanted to finish his bacon and eggs.

"We haven't quite decided," he said.

"Margaret Phillips is wonderful," Zara suggested.

"Too cold. Clever, but not Cynthia."

"What about Julie Harris?"

"Too spirituelle. This girl's got to be gay."

"June Lockhart couldn't be more attractive."

"Tied up."

"Patricia Kirkland?"

He shook his head. "Not just who I had in mind."

He rattled his fork against his plate, looked out of the window. Not until the words were said did she believe he could say them.

"Vince has a girl in mind—new in New York—and you know how the critics fall for a new face. I—I saw her act last summer—very clever: I—I pointed her out to you one night in the Stork Club. Name's Jo-Anne McKensey."

There it was! Out in the open! She couldn't say anything. Kent went on: "We're thinking of Luke Marshall to direct. You like him, don't you?"

"Very much," she said truthfully, trying to keep her mind on him. He wasn't brilliant or subtle, but he could turn a wooden figure into an actor. Kent was getting Marshall to turn a pretty, inexperienced puppet into the semblance of a girl attractive enough to take a man

away from an older woman. Well, in real life she could do it, couldn't she?

"You said Vince hadn't read the play."

"I've told him about it in detail, of course. He's got the money and we've sounded out Marshall. Nothing's set."

He forgot how he'd always talked over everything with Zara. This was different.

"You'll help with the dialogue?" he went on. "I'm counting on you."

"I always do, don't I? Glad to do it," she said easily.

And there they were—talking the way they used to talk. Almost the way! And as they talked, in the under layer of her mind something came to Zara—the way things come to you if you need them and want them badly enough. The twig to cling to! The light in the distance! If she were only clever enough! She couldn't do much at first. It would have to be very gradual. If—if she could . . . It was her only chance! Please, God!

Kent Crane had it bad. None of these little soft love affairs. There'd been a lot of those. This was different. He was fond of Zara—but this was breath-taking. He was almost proud because, at his age, he was capable of such deep and exciting emotion. Everything the girl did seemed important, interesting. The way she smiled. The things she said—little sentences unfinished. She was straightforward, aware of herself. She wanted to get ahead in the theater. She knew what she had to offer—youth and good looks and a certain impudence. She'd confessed to him, later, how thrilled she'd been, meeting him at that funny little stock company.

"I love the things you've written! That was one of the big moments of my life! My idea of heaven would be to be in a play of yours," she said, smiling. Other women treated him as half of a married couple—always aware

of Zara or wanting sly dates. And Zara—well, Zara was a damned attractive woman. Why shouldn't she be? He wrote plays for her, protected her. She had everything—everyone catered to her, wrapped her in cotton wool.

He actually met Jo-Anne by accident, when she got back to town. She was looking for a job and he ran into her. Poor little kid! Good, in spite of a surface hardness—maybe she assumed that hardness was her best protection.

"What about having lunch with me?" he asked. Poor kid! She looked as if she didn't get enough to eat, at that.

He took her to Sardi's. And it gave him a nice, superior feeling because she was impressed by the number of people who spoke to him. Zara took that sort of thing for granted—and it was usually Zara they wanted to speak to, anyhow. This kid enjoyed having celebrities pointed out to her, too. And her responses were so gay, so free of convention, that they made him feel young and care-free too.

He could urge her to eat substantial food. After years of Zara's diet, this was a relief. And how pretty she was!

Perhaps he didn't fall in love with her at this first luncheon. But when it was over, he found himself begging her to see him again. He took her to dinner, two nights later, at the Colony. And again she was impressed and pleased. Why, underneath her hardness, she was just a sweet, trusting little kid, hoping to make good! When he took her home—to that horrible little room—it seemed perfectly natural to kiss her good night. She sort of clung to him—and her lips were soft and young and warm.

After that, they just took it for granted that they were going to see each other frequently. As often as Kent could get away. He began to feel like a schoolboy escaping from strict headmasters. At first, he half explained to Zara that he had a business date. Why should he have to explain

at all? He didn't want to quarrel with Zara. He wanted to dismiss her from his mind altogether.

Kent was glad because the city was so large that he could take Jo-Anne to a hundred different restaurants and not be noticed. He knew she preferred the Stork and Twenty-one and the Colony, but he couldn't risk those too often. Not the way things were now! Maybe someday . . . He'd find a way out. He didn't want Zara to find out anything—not yet, anyhow. Something would happen. Maybe he could persuade Zara to give him his freedom . . .

"I don't like to see you living in this drab little room," he said.

"It's all I can afford. I can hardly pay for this! If—if something doesn't turn up soon—"

"You poor darling!" he said. "You wouldn't let—"

"Of course not! You do enough for me now."

It was fate, or something, when Jerry McCann told Kent he was going to Hollywood for a three-month stint.

"Know anyone who wants an apartment? Small, but modern. Flats get grabbed up in a hurry, but I want someone who is reliable for the short sublease."

Before he knew it, Kent had the apartment and paid the rent in advance. He made up a tall tale for Jo-Anne and she swallowed it—all about the apartment being empty if she didn't live in it. It was a cute little place, with pretty good modern furniture. Now things were a little better. He could spend hours with Jo-Anne. He'd bring a bottle of champagne and the chocolates Jo-Anne liked, and maybe some flowers. And he'd hold Jo-Anne in his arms, and feel like a very young man on a first date with his girl. This was living! This was worth all the dull days that had gone before. His girl—Jo-Anne. So sweet and clinging and—and young! He thought of her all the time—her voice, her name, the image of her, all coming between

him and the rest of the world, between him and Zara, between him and his friends. Obsession? Maybe. He didn't know. Infatuation? Could be. But it was wonderful—and it had never happened to him before. Zara and he had had a calm and lengthy courtship, and other women he had known had been flat and unexciting interludes. Jo-Anne was romance and excitement and wonder.

When the idea of the play came to him, he was beside himself with joy. He'd build Jo-Anne into a young star! He'd have to write a part for Zara, but she would fade before the young actress's brilliance. Then Zara could put on a great renunciation scene—she liked getting dramatic. And they'd get a divorce! And he'd marry Jo-Anne and write plays for her, and regain his youth through her. And the two of them would go on—the critics praising him for his understanding of the younger generation. And Jo-Anne would keep on telling him, as she always told him, that at heart he was younger than she—just a boy who, through some magic, had grown into a successful playwright but had kept youth in his heart. Kent loathed getting old—gray in his hair, the hours he spent in a gymnasium. Jo-Anne treated him as if he were young, and he felt she cared for him for himself. Couldn't she have found a hundred admirers?

He was relieved when Zara was so sensible about the play. No one would tell her anything in that cotton-wool nest! He was pretty clever, he felt, the way he'd brought Jo-Anne's name into the conversation.

He only glanced at Zara's changes in dialogue. He had to smile when he saw she'd given herself some new lines. Let her have them—they couldn't change the fundamentals of the play.

Vincent Grey liked the script. Kent knew he would.

Vince didn't know much about plays, though he'd produced them for twenty-five years. He played safe: put on works by established authors and with established stars.

"You haven't given Zara a lot to do," he said.

"You know Zara! She'll build up her part."

"Guess you're right! You sure you aren't putting too much on McKensy? No experience and she'll have to carry several scenes."

"They are short ones. Most of her scenes are with Zara, and Denver is good. The public falls for good-looking young players."

"I guess you know what you're doing."

Of course he knew! Rehearsals started, and Marshall took hold, just the way Kent knew he would.

"Some of the dialogue doesn't play well," he said.

"I'm torn to a frazzle, writing the thing," said Kent. "Zara knows more about dialogue than I do, if you need a line here or there—"

"Fine!" said Marshall. "Most playwrights aren't so sensible."

"I've never been one of those top-heavy guys."

"That's right!" said Vince Grey. "Unless I need you, you stay out of the way. You're a director's delight!"

Kent didn't think it necessary to say that Zara always polished up his plays. Now, like a lovesick boy, he thought only of Jo-Anne, paying little attention to what was going on at rehearsals. He didn't notice the changes Zara made.

"You've sure made a stronger scene," said Marshall. Lawrence Denver complained about his changes.

"Makes me a sap," he said.

"Nonsense!" said Marshall. "Half the young actors on Broadway would give an eyetooth or maybe even their hairline for that part. You just hate to learn new lines. You don't hear Miss McKensy complain."

Mostly, though, rehearsals ran smoothly, the smaller roles emerging with the brilliance Kent always showed.

"You've got mighty good stuff there," Marshall told him. "The critics will eat up the bartender. And those kids have a good love scene."

"Glad you like it," said Kent. He didn't like rehearsals now, except when he knew that if he hung around, JoAnne would soon be free to join him.

"Marshall makes me work hard," she told him.

"He'll turn you into a real actress."

"I'm a real actress now."

"I know you are, honey. But this is New York. You do what Marshall tells you. I want you to be a great star someday."

"I will be, too! You know, it's funny, but Zara is very nice to me."

"Why shouldn't she be? She doesn't—suspect—anything. And she won't until after the opening. I want this play to go smoothly. Come to me if you have any problems."

There weren't any problems. But they always had a lot to talk about.

Maxwell Harely was doing the costumes. He and Zara had a long talk about them—the way they always talked about costumes for her plays. Julius Goode was doing the sets: a gracious living room, a corner saloon. Zara had long talks about the sets, too.

"Is Margaret Charles doing the lighting?" Zara asked him.

"Of course!"

"I'll call Margaret about a lighting rehearsal. She can arrange for the spotlight man in the balcony and the light man at the backstage master switch."

Zara knew her business, all right. Everyone connected

with the play felt that. It hadn't looked like much in the beginning, but it was shaping up all right now.

Kent caught cold. He was home on the afternoon Zara had her light rehearsal, but it wouldn't have bothered him. Stars like this bit of hocus-pocus—this consulting about where each spotlight was to be.

The light rehearsal was successful. The light men noted just where Zara would stand, agreed with Margaret Charles that the No. 17 special lavender was certainly the best for her.

"It's a pleasure," said Miss Charles, "to have a special light rehearsal for a star who knows what it's all about."

Kent's cold developed into influenza. Vince Grey came by to see him. "You're too old for all this running around," he said.

"Nonsense! I worked hard on the play, got run down."

"Well, you can take it easy now. We don't need you. There's a run-through today, a dress rehearsal tomorrow, three previews before the opening. Lucky for you we're opening cold—you don't have to trail to Philadelphia or worry about things."

"You think Jo-Anne is all right? It's her first chance!"

"Marshall has done all right by her. Never dreamed she would be that good."

"I'm glad," said Kent. He must remember, when he felt better, to see that Vince took the credit for discovering Jo-Anne.

Kent lay in bed and fretted. When he felt better, he shuffled into the library and tried to read. His play in rehearsal and Jo-Anne there without him! Not that she needed him. Everyone had acted all right, she had reported.

Zara rushed home between rehearsals, ate sandwiches, rushed back again.

"How's everything going?"

"Couldn't be better."

"You don't miss me?"

"Of course we do! But there isn't a thing—we haven't changed a line in days."

"The cast?"

"They know their lines and they're all scared—a typical before-opening feeling."

He wanted to ask about Jo-Anne. Didn't dare. Poor Zaral! He was filled with remorse and humiliation as he thought what the critics would say about her in this minor and unrewarding role, while a young girl got all the honors. A star going up and a star going down. Well, he'd made her what she was! He couldn't help it if he'd fallen in love with a younger girl—a real artist has got to do what his heart dictates.

He managed to get to one of the before-opening performances for a few minutes. But the lighting wasn't right and everything looked drab and gray, even Harely's costumes; but he knew Jo-Anne, with her cute little figure, would look fine. His head hurt and he felt weak and didn't even recognize some of the lines. Zara's additions. From now on, he'd have to work without Zara. Oh, he could manage! He was glad to get home and into bed. He'd be all right for the opening. Not that he ever saw a play through, opening night. He always wandered backstage or to the topmost seat in the gallery; or, if things were going well, he stood in the back of the house, pretending he didn't want to be seen. This opening would be different: Kent Crane's new play, "Triumph," introducing the young girl he loved.

Jo-Anne McKensy was nervous on opening night—and yet sure of herself. She'd always known something nice would happen. Hadn't she always been different—the prettiest girl on the block! Here she was practically starring in a play written just for her! She was sorry she had

quarreled with her folks—so she could not write them about it. Maybe it was just as well, or the whole family would land on her. Better let well enough alone!

Kent Crane—he was an old fool, but sweet. Tiresome as all getout, but after the opening he'd promised he would take her all the time to places where she'd see famous people—he wouldn't be afraid of his wife any more.

From the first moment she'd seen Kent she'd known she could land him. He fell for everything she said and just lapped up compliments as if they were cream. She'd marry him—unless someone better came along. She'd be on top and not have to take just anybody. She'd be a star—when the critics saw how much better she was than Zara Evans. She was a funny one, that Zara. Cold as a cucumber. And always keeping to herself. When she was a star, she'd see that things were gayer around the theater.

Opening night and people worrying and fussing. She got only a few telegrams, but she spread them around. White orchids from Kent—he thought white orchids were wonderful. He and Zara were having a party for the cast and some friends after the show. Wait till Zara saw the notices! Didn't she even suspect that the play showed her up as an old crow who couldn't hold her man? She'd see—when she read the notices!

Jo-Anne, dressing alone, as Zara did, put on her make-up slowly. She felt she didn't remember a line—but that's the way it had been in summer stock. When she got on the stage she'd be all right. She knew she was good. Kent always told her so, and even if he was in love with her, he wouldn't have given her such a swell part unless he thought she was great. During those long weeks of rehearsal on that dusty stage she'd taken Marshall's direction, but there were a couple of places where she was going to read the lines her way. There was nothing he could do about it!

She dressed herself. She didn't have a maid, but she decided she'd have one before long. She wouldn't ask for a raise just yet—men like to think you're unworldly and not greedy.

Knocks on the door—half hour—fifteen minutes—time to go on!

There she was—in the wings! Someone slapped her bottom—for luck. And she was on!

Her first scene was in the saloon where she and Lawrence got acquainted. The lines said themselves easily—after the first minute it all seemed familiar. Funny, though, Lawrence's lines sounded cheaper than she remembered them. Coarse, almost! And Lawrence looked kind of common, too, and his clothes were loud. Maybe he looked all right from the front. She liked her dress—sort of fancy, but pretty, and she felt it was becoming. Because Lawrence's lines sounded vulgar, she began to get more elegant in her own delivery, to show the audience this wasn't just a cheap pick-up, but the beginning of a beautiful romance.

The audience laughed at some of her best lines! That surprised her. She hadn't thought them funny. But she knew the value of laughs.

She got quite a hand at the end of the scene.

At the end of the first act, everyone said things were going just fine. Just before her next entrance, Kent came in. He looked tired. He was getting old, that one!

"I hear you went over swell!" he said. She knew that, without his telling her, but hearing it wasn't bad.

"You missed my scene?"

"I was with Vince. I'll catch your big scenes, baby!"

She had another scene with Denvers. It went over all right, in spite of the laughs in odd places.

Then she had her first scene with Zara. And it was entirely different than it had been at rehearsals. Zara's

voice was different! She had sort of run through during rehearsals. Now she paused at odd times, and while Jo-Anne spoke, she picked up things, or pulled at a thread on her dress. Or turned her back! It made Jo-Anne have to sort of run after her, as if she were saying, "Please listen to me!" That was not the idea at all! Sometimes Zara acted as if she didn't hear what Jo-Anne was saying. And she stepped on the end of Jo-Anne's speeches. Or waited longer than she had at rehearsals, which made Jo-Anne sort of fidgety. Maybe Zara was nervous—opening night and all. She hadn't acted this way at the dress rehearsals or the previews. Well, she didn't make Jo-Anne go up in her lines, and she didn't keep her from getting applause!

The lighting annoyed Jo-Anne, too. A funny spotlight followed Zara around, and she couldn't get in it, no matter how she tried.

The next scene was better. There were a lot of people on the stage and Jo-Anne knew where to stand and didn't have much to say. She hadn't remembered that the groups all seemed to form so that Zara was the focal point—with that spotlight on her—but that's the way it was. Oh, well, wait until that big scene, when she'd put Zara in her place!

The big scene! They'd rehearsed that enough! Zara had always played it the way you'd expect—the way a woman would act if a pretty girl had stolen her man and left her alone. Now Zara made all the words sound different. She was calm and—well, kind of superior, and with a sort of condescending tenderness. Jo-Anne didn't know what to do. When Zara had grown angry, she had screamed at her. It was difficult to scream at this calm woman, but she'd rehearsed screaming, so she screamed. And while she screamed, Zara did little things—whirled her skirt around or fingered her pearl necklace. And she smiled

when she should have been in tears. What was the matter with Zara? Was she folding up? Jo-Anne was angry. She didn't want her best scene ruined just because Zara had forgotten what to do. Well, the audience applauded loud enough! Oh, they applauded Zara, too. Loyalty, undoubtedly!

Jo-Anne heard the applause for Zara's scene with Denvers. Well, at least she hadn't gone to pieces. There was one more scene—the three of them together. She did hope the play wouldn't fail because Zara forgot what to do.

Zara acted just as oddly as she had before! She acted deaf—and walked upstage. And you've got to shout when someone acts like that! Lawrence sounded coarser than ever—but the audience appreciated it when Jo-Anne acted like a lady! The ending certainly was odd—Zara forgot what to do—almost laughing—and only half pretending to cry. Well, the show was over.

Everyone applauded like mad. They all took bows. And Zara didn't seem to know her part was unimportant and pitiful, and that she hadn't even played the way she'd rehearsed. She bowed with all the others. And then took a bow all alone! The conceited fool! She just had sense enough to motion for the others for the final curtain!

Jo-Anne put on her new black dress and put her new pearls around her neck—she didn't know how good they were. Kent had given them to her and she hadn't had time to take them to a jeweler for appraisal. A knock on her door. It was Kent.

"Ready?" he asked. "I want you to drive to the house with us."

"I'm ready!" She'd driven in that big black car, but not with Zara or the others there.

"Your first big opening night is over! Tired?"

"Of course not! At my age! How did it go?"

"Good, I hope! Now we'll just drink and act cheerful until the morning papers come out!"

Zara was already in the car with two bit players. Jo-Anne crowded in—luckily she could lean against Kent.

Some of the guests were already there—a couple of unimportant critics on weekly publications, some actors and actresses who weren't working, some friends of the Cranes' who had been out front. All of the company arrived . . .

Everyone drank champagne and ate lobster mousse and creamed chicken and ham and tongue. And voices were too high, nervous. Only Zara seemed self-contained, calm. Maybe she knew what a fool she'd made of herself—and that she was through! Maybe she knew that Jo-Anne had—well—taken her place!

A man played a long, dull piece on the piano. Jo-Anne didn't believe anyone enjoyed it. A woman sang, and they applauded like mad. An oldish couple did a silly English music-hall act.

No one paid any attention to her. They'd sing a different tune when they read the reviews.

Someone telephoned to Art Ford at WNEW.

"Ford says that John Chapman loves the show!" No details. Just that. People began looking a little more cheerful.

"I'll go out and get the papers," said Vince Grey, finally. "They'll be at Times Square any minute."

When the reviews arrived, things would happen. That would be the most important minute in her life! They'd see how Kent felt—and that Zara was a has-been. She imagined reading: "A new star is born!" and "The first genius of the season!"

Some of the guests left—to catch trains, they said. Jo-Anne felt that they didn't want to hear of Zara's failure.

Any minute now . . . Her head whirled, the way she

felt when she'd had a wisdom tooth pulled and took gas. The others in the company were nervous too, but of course they didn't have so much at stake—didn't realize . . .

The doorbell rang. Everyone straightened to attention. Kent hurried to the door.

Vince came in, bringing almost a definite breeze with him. He had papers in his hand.

"We've done it again!" he said. "I read as much as I could in the taxi. Brooks Atkinson and John Chapman raved. Walter Kerr was nearly as enthusiastic. Bob Coleman thinks Kent has written a classic!"

"Isn't that wonderful!" "Let's seel!" "I was sure all along!" People spoke in staccatos, a jumble of words.

"Let Kent read the notices," someone said.

"I'm much too modest," Kent said, "and my throat's sore. Vince, you read them."

Everyone froze into silence. Jo-Anne dropped her eyes—felt more self-conscious than she'd ever felt; she was usually at ease anyplace. Vince was reading. Jo-Anne didn't know what paper or hear all the words. His voice was not too smooth—he wasn't accustomed to reading aloud.

"... Zara Evans and Kent Crane came into their own last night. If, before this, we have regarded them too lightly, our hat is off to them now. In "Triumph," Kent Crane emerges as a mature and expert playwright, and Zara Evans, looking more beautiful than ever, works magic with the brilliant and subtle lines. No other playwright could turn such a simple theme into such poignant drama, and no other actress could achieve, with seeming simplicity, such heart-tearing climax. The story is the hackneyed one of two women in love with one man. Lawrence Denvers plays brilliantly the cheap, conceited, and unworthy man, and the young woman, a tawdry little tart he picks up at a bar, is adequately played by a newcomer, Jo-Anne McKensy. The older woman, played by Zara Evans,

emerges as a three-dimensional character, a woman who knows she has loved unwisely and who knows that renunciation is her only way of happiness. Her third-act scene with the younger woman is a flawless bit of playing. The young tart, demanding that Laura give up the young man, loses her veneer of refinement and becomes a screaming little vixen, while Zara Evans underplays every emotion. With Miss Evans's unobtrusive assistance and with such perfect technique you are hardly aware of it, she helps Miss McKensey to get along very well in a difficult role. Otherwise, she might prove a colorless new ingénue . . . ”

Jo-Anne couldn't believe it. What did that critic mean? She a guttersnipe, and Zara a great actress! It couldn't be! Why, Zara had done all the wrong things, while she, Jo-Anne, had done all—well, nearly all—the things Marshall had taught her! This critic was probably a friend of Zara's. The others—

Vince read on. Jo-Anne dug her nails into her palms. “...could have been a monologue by the beautiful and magical Zara Evans, as she showed us, last night, that glamorous middle age is superior to colorless youth. In the brilliant and subtle “Triumph,” Kent Crane has shown depths that those who enjoyed his lighter plays never suspected. His dialogue is brilliant and understanding. Zara Evans's lovely voice has never been used to better advantage. Jo-Anne McKensey, as the cheap little street girl, and Lawrence Denvers as the stupid young man, do little to assist Miss Evans, who needs no assistance, so perfect is her technique. Smaller roles show taste in both writing and acting. The splendid direction . . . ”

What did they mean? Why, this wasn't the play about two lovely young people in love and the awful clinging older woman! Something had gone wrong. Vince was reading another review. Maybe—

“‘...to make us believe that Zara Evans is a middle-aged woman whom any man could cease to love is pulling the cord of probability too far. To ask us to accept the fact that she has given her affection to a worthless rotter who picks up cheap girls in bars is humanly impossible. Yet Crane, with knowledge of psychology and the theater, has mixed both ideas into probability. Zara Evans, looking younger and acting better, leaves you moist-eyed when she sends the soiled doves away together. Lawrence Denvers, as the rotter, and Jo-Anne McKensey, as the shrill-voiced girl, are adequate. The bartender...’”

They kept on, those newspapers! Where was her big night?

“‘Add “Triumph” to the list of plays you must see. Zara Evans and Kent Crane have added their best play to the new season. The always brilliant Zara Evans of the golden voice has added new technique... Kent Crane, now our most brilliant playwright...’”

Vince finished reading, and everyone moved suddenly, kissed Zara, said, “Isn’t it wonderful!” “You’ve done it again, you twos!” And “Wait until you read Dick Watts and Bill Hawkins—you know how they love Zara!” And “Ward Morehouse thinks he discovered Zara—he’ll go to town, and wait until you read Winchell...”

Jo-Anne tried to smile. But it didn’t matter—no one paid any attention to her. She felt a thickening in her throat, was almost dizzy. She couldn’t stand it! Not a minute more!

“I’ve got to talk to you!” She hurried up to Kent.

“In a minute. Can’t you see—”

“I see a lot of things! I’ve got to talk to you!”

“All right!” His voice was impatient. “I’ll go into the library.”

She'd left her coat in the library, so she knew where it was. Kent followed her into the room.

"What did you think you were trying to do?" she asked.

"Telling my guests good-bye."

"I don't mean that, as you well know! Writing a play and pretending it was for me!"

"It was for you, Jo-Anne! I swear -"

"That's a good one!" Her voice grew louder. "You're going to make a star out of me, and your wife gets all the praise—and—and they called me a guttersnipe."

"They were referring to—to your acting."

"But you told me the part was entirely different."

"That is what I thought. But, evidently, the way it was played—"

"That's a likely story! After all the things you said, you and—and Zara plotted behind my back—double-crossed me!"

"You don't mean that! You talk like a wife who has been betrayed. 'The best years of my life!'"

"I don't know what you're talking about! You promised me a lot—and look what happened!"

"You mean—you wouldn't have—have—well, gone with me if you hadn't thought I'd—well, make a success of you?"

"You guessed it! You're twice my age! I'd—call you an old man if I wasn't a lady."

"That sounds like a line out of the play," Kent said seriously.

"Always a play! Look, I won't stand for this! You've—you've got to do something!"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Well, you can just rewrite that damned old play—the way you promised."

"I don't see how I can do that, Jo-Anne. I—I tried to write it for you. I'm sorry if things—"

"You're a liar! That's what you are!"

"I don't like that, Jo-Annel" Was this the girl he'd thought about, dreamed about?

"That's too bad! What you like! You promised me something! You can just go to those old critics and tell them your wife played a trick on you."

"Why, Jo-Anne! What do you mean?"

"You know, all right! Either you double-crossed me, or you're so dumb you don't know what happened. I did just what Marshall told me and then she talked funny—sometimes too fast and sometimes too slow, and always too low—and I had a hard time saying my lines at all!"

Suddenly Kent started to laugh. Real laughter. And he couldn't stop laughing.

"You!" said Jo-Anne. "Playing tricks on a girl like me! You—an old man—and your old middle-aged wife! I—well, I'm through! That's what I am—through!"

She expected him to crumple up. Grovel. Apologize. After all the things he'd said. He stood there laughing instead.

"I'm going to quit the show! You'll never see me again!"

"Perhaps that's just as well," Kent said. "Now that I know how you feel. Your understudy—"

"You! You!" screamed Jo-Anne, and couldn't think of a thing strong enough to say. She flounced out, furious, still trying to think of a proper answer.

Zara was telling the last guests good-bye. She knew Jo-Anne and Kent had left the room together. She felt a great wave of relief when he came back alone. The girl was gone, then. She didn't allow herself to wonder what had happened.

She and Kent were alone.

She stood very straight and still.

"We did it again!" Kent tried to make his voice sound natural, hearty. "Swell notices!"

"Yes, they were fine!"

He swallowed, tried again: "They all said how well you looked—admired your technique." Compliments had always worked before.

"They were kind." A wall of ice hung between them.

"Zara," he said, "I'm sorry! I'm a fool! To have let things come between us like this! You were swell—about the play—"

"You sound like a bad actor in a melodrama," she said. "What came between us? The fact that you wrote a good play for me?"

"You devil!" he said. "You beautiful, terrible, brilliant devil!"

"That's better!" she said. "Makes more sense! More consistent!" Suddenly she was laughing.

"How could you, Zara?" he asked. "When did you know? And how did you think of—of—of doing a thing like that? I didn't think you were capable—"

"—of being a good actress, Kent?"

"Be yourself, can't you! How did you think of it? When did you begin? The clothes and the sets and the lights and the dialogue—and your acting. I caught just enough of the show, but I wasn't sure until I read the reviews."

"It's a good play."

"It is—now. Zara, you'll never know how—how grateful I am to you—for everything. But then I've always been. But when did you know—how much did you know?"

She laughed again.

"That, darling, you'll never find out."

"But you must care for me, or you wouldn't—"

"Of course I do," she said, "or I wouldn't have done—anything! You'd be even more conceited if you knew how much. I guess I had to—well, fight for you. My way. The only way I had. In the theater. Technique!"

He put his arms around her, held her close. He had almost forgotten how wonderful she was—and how wonderful in his arms. Her perfume . . .

“Oh, Zara, it’s been such a long time!”

“Only a season,” she said, purposely misunderstanding him. “Zara Evans and Kent Clark, good dressers on and off, as they used to say in vaudeville. Plays written and acted to order.”

They laughed together. Zara thought her laughter sounded real—real enough to fool Kent. She had done it! The play was a success and Kent was back! Kent was back! This time Maybe for a long time, please God.

THE ODD OLD LADY

THE FIRST TIME that old Mrs. Quillan knew anything was, well, different, was the night at dinner when Winnie came into the dining room wearing her new blue dress.

Winnie was seventeen and the prettiest of the old lady's grandchildren. She had soft, light hair and a tip-tilted nose, and had just got over the sloppy-sweater stage. Now she wore a dress that fitted closely her slim, young body.

"I'm so glad you got the spot out of your dress," the old lady said, in her gentle voice with just a suggestion of a quaver in it.

"What spot do you mean, Grandma?" asked Winnie. "This is my new dress. I never had a spot on it."

"Why, didn't Ralph Miller spill chocolate ice-cream soda on it and we couldn't..." Grandma began and stopped suddenly.

"You must have dreamed that, Mother," said Julia Latham a bit uncertainly. It wasn't like Mrs. Quillan to imagine things. Everybody was always saying how clear her mind was.

"Of course, I... I guess I dreamed it," said the old lady quickly. She put some raspberry jam on a piece of bread for Bobby and was glad he didn't say anything. Bobby was a great one for repeating things. So was Evan,

her son-in-law. They never meant anything by it, Grandma knew that. But they liked family jokes. If . . . if they took this up . . . Grandma gave a sigh of relief when they began talking about something else.

For, as soon as she had said it, Grandma knew! She knew as definitely as she knew that on the table stood the old teapot and sugar bowl that Grandpa had brought her when he'd gone to St. Louis many years ago. It wasn't a dream! She knew something no one else could know. And it had never happened to her before. Winnie didn't know about the spot on her dress because she hadn't yet spotted her dress! Ralph Miller hadn't yet spilled the chocolate soda down the front of it. Poor Winnie! Her lovely new dress to be ruined like that! Grandma couldn't warn her.

There was nothing she could do, for Grandma didn't know how she knew about the spot. Sometimes, here of late, she'd got sort of mixed up about things. Like when she thought she'd seen Mrs. Willis on the street—and Mrs. Willis had been dead for three years! Oh, Grandma knew, all right, when she thought hard. And she tried to think before she said things, but this had sort of tumbled out. Oh, well, maybe she was wrong! Maybe Winnie wouldn't spot her dress after all.

Grandma tried to pretend to herself that she hadn't said anything.

There were lots of things to do. Dishes to wash. Beds to make. Helping her daughter, Julia, so that Julia could have time for the things she liked to do. Doing the things Winnie was supposed to do, because Winnie hated housework. A young girl has to have some fun!

Three days later Winnie flew into the house.

"That awkward goon of a Ralph Miller!" she wailed. "He spilled a whole glass of chocolate ice-cream soda all

over my dress! He said Chester Alden shoved his arm. It never will come out, I know!"

"You'd better take it right to the cleaners," her mother said, "unless Grandma..."

"I'm afraid I can't," said Grandma, knowing the spot would always show.

"It's my new dress!" said Winnie. And then she remembered. "Grandma, didn't you say I'd get chocolate soda on my dress?"

"Oh, Grandma was just imagining things. She wasn't even with you. Rush out to the cleaners with that dress," Julia said.

Winnie ran away and Grandma took a deep breath of thankfulness. Maybe they wouldn't mention what she'd said about the spot ever again. It was too bad, though, it's coming true. Winnie didn't get many pretty things. Grandma made a resolution to be more careful.

It was odd about life, anyway. One time everything had run along so smoothly. There'd been the little cottage and Grandpa, and then the children. There wasn't even time to think about things, then. Everything was in its right order—just the way it happened. Breakfast to get—heartly breakfasts, for Grandpa worked hard and liked hot biscuits and a nice piece of fried ham in the morning. And there was bread to bake—fat, fragrant loaves, and coffee roasting in the oven and bacon frying. Grandma liked nice smells. And sewing for the whole family—you couldn't buy good, ready-made things in those days. And long rides with Grandpa in the surrey behind Nelly, the steady, old mare. And then this big house, and a girl to help with the cleaning, though Grandma liked to do the cooking herself. And the children growing up...

And now Grandpa was dead and little Josephine was dead. And Arthur was married and living in Chicago, and he never forgot to send a check every month and a letter,

too, though being married to a wife none of them knew very well sort of separated them.

Grandma shook her head. Everything was all right! Here she was, living with Julia and Evan, who were so good to her. Of course the house was hers, and Arthur's check went into the family coffers, but she knew Evan did the best he could. Grandma did her share, too. And she was glad she could help in the house and with the neighbors when she had a chance. Dr. Clement was mighty good about coming by, and picking her up, and letting her do things when he had a patient who was too poor to hire a nurse.

Yes, everything was all right, except knowing things. And even that might be all right, if she could remember to keep things straight in her mind.

It was last year when things began to get mixed up. Things that had happened a long time ago seemed to have happened only yesterday. And things that had happened only yesterday she couldn't remember at all. She asked Dr. Clement about it—as if it were happening to someone else, and he said that's the way it was sometimes when you got old.

It wasn't much fun getting old. Grandma knew she took little, short steps, and the others had to walk slowly when they went to church. And there were her teeth . . . and her eyes. And it was lonely without Grandpa, though she never let the others know. There weren't many men like Grandpa. She'd been lucky having him all those years. The year they planted the lilac bush . . . It seemed odd when she forgot it had been planted many years ago.

But that was all right, remembering things that happened so long ago and forgetting the things that happened just yesterday. It was this new thing that worried Grandma, knowing things before they happened at all. But maybe it was an accident—knowing about the stain on the blue

dress. She must be careful and keep her mind on what she was saying.

But she forgot that day at breakfast. The rest of the family drank coffee, but Grandma liked tea.

"Bring in Grandma's tea," Julia called to Winnie, who was carrying things in from the kitchen.

"Just bring my tea in a cup," said Grandma, "as long as the teapot's broken." But she was sorry about the teapot, for she loved it.

"The teapot's not broken, Mother," said Julia.

"But Bobby broke it," said Grandma. "Don't you remember? I don't mind, really. He couldn't help it."

"Here's your teapot," said Winnie and put it on the table in front of Grandma.

"I'm sorry," Grandma said, "I just imagined it, I guess."

But she hadn't imagined it. She just hadn't realized that the teapot hadn't yet been broken! She picked it up lovingly and watched the clear amber stream pour into her cup.

"You're getting odd notions, Mother," said Evan, "the way you imagine things!"

"I know," said Grandma, "maybe things that I dream of. . . ."

She put her hands into her lap suddenly. They were trembling so she couldn't have held the pot another minute.

A couple of days later, Bobby came home from school and reached for the cookie jar, high on the shelf, and the teapot careened onto the floor and lay there, broken.

"I couldn't help it!" wailed Bobby. "Maybe, because what Grandma said about my breaking the teapot. . . ."

"Of course," comforted Grandma, "I sort of put it into your mind. You couldn't help it at all." She gave Bobby some of the Jordan almonds Mrs. Rogers had brought her on her birthday. No one said anything else about

the teapot—after all, it was just an old teapot that only Grandma cared about.

"I'll be more careful after this!" Grandma told herself. But it worried her. It was all right the days she took an umbrella when the skies were still clear, because old ladies were apt to carry umbrellas. And going to see old Mrs. Hodges when she was lying alone and ill, because Grandma always had gone to see Mrs. Hodges. Only that day Grandma took a basket of provisions and wore her old clothes, the way she did when Dr. Clement took her to see sick people. But no one thought anything about it, because no one but Grandma was interested in Mrs. Hodges.

It was different about Winnie's new beau. Grandma knew about him as if it had already happened. But she couldn't seem to see clearly the people he was mixed up with. It couldn't be Winnie! Winnie couldn't get into anything like that!

Grandma thought it over and she knew she had to warn Evan, though she usually stayed out of things.

"That new boy from Chicago—I wouldn't let Winnie go out with him," she said.

"Why, Mother, he's a cousin of the Dillmans," Evan said. "He's been ill, came here to build up. A fine young man!"

"He's not a fine young man," Grandma said. "He'll . . . he'll get into trouble. I don't want Winnie . . ."

"The way you talk!" said Winnie. "Honest, Grandma, he couldn't be nicer—not like these dull home-town boys I'm used to."

The others agreed—a nice young man, Sid Forrest.

They never knew that when Sid telephoned, and Grandma answered the call, she didn't tell Winnie. And she gave Winnie the wrong direction the day Sid was to meet her at the library.

But when Winnie continued to see Sid, Grandma knew

she had to do something. She even worried about it at night in bed.

Finally, she made up her mind. One day she put on her best black dress, with a little, white-embroidered collar, and the brooch Grandpa had given her, and her rather shapeless little black hat, and went to see Morris Dillman.

Mr. Dillman was a tall, lanky gentleman, with a lined face. He had known Grandma Quillan all of his life.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Quillan?" he asked kindly.

"It's about Sid Forrest," Grandma said. "He's going with Winnie, my granddaughter. I don't want him to come to the house any more."

"Why, Mrs. Quillan, he's my own second cousin. We're very fond of him. Did the family send you?"

"Oh, no, they don't know anything about it. I thought, if we talked it over..."

"I'll see what I can do," said Dillman, as if he were talking to a child. "Now, you go home and forget all about it."

"Oh, thank you," Grandma said. And stayed on to talk about little things, so Mr. Dillman wouldn't think she was odd or anything.

Morris Dillman must have gone right over to see Evan Latham, for by the time Grandma got home—she had stopped in to see Mrs. Morrison and the twins—the whole family knew about her call.

"Why, Mama," Julia said, "I don't know what's got into you lately. It isn't like you at all."

"Dillman thought it was odd," said Evan, who looked worried, too, "his cousin and all..."

"Why, Mother," Julia said sternly, "you'll ruin Winnie's chances..."

"I've never done anything like this before. And she'll have other chances. She's only seventeen."

Winnie was in tears. She didn't say anything.

But Sid kept on seeing Winnie. Grandma didn't know what to do. If there were only some way she could tell them what she knew. And right on the heels of that, there was that thing she said, without thinking, on the way to church.

"They're certainly neglecting the Kerner house since old man Kerner died," Grandma said.

They all looked at her curiously.

"Why, what makes you think he's dead?" Evan asked.

"Why, he died that day we had the rainstorm..." She began, then stopped, remembering!

"He's as alive as any of us," Evan said. "But they do neglect their place, all right—too lazy to keep it up. You mustn't get notions like that in your mind, Mother."

Old man Kerner died a few weeks later, and it rained hard the day he died. It was funny, Grandma saying that.

And when she said that about the Bates's apple tree being struck by lightning, weeks beforehand. Just a coincidence, of course, but it was odd...

Grandma began to be afraid to say anything. She had to think over carefully what she was going to say, and try to remember if a thing had happened twenty years ago—or yesterday—or was going to happen tomorrow. It was like, well, being up in a balloon, or maybe an airplane. Grandma didn't know about airplanes. She'd never been up in a balloon, either. But an airplane winged so swiftly through the sky, surely it couldn't get a view of the whole country at one time. A balloon seemed sort of stationary. She could see everything all stretched out at one time, though not too clearly, sometimes.

Yesterdays, a long way back, were clear. But recent yesterdays were dimmed, with just a few things plain. Today was clear enough. And tomorrow was like yester-

day—certain things standing out bright and real and shining, the rest of it sort of dim, as if it were still in Time.

Sometimes Grandma knew, by the way the family looked at her, that she had said things she didn't mean to say, even when she didn't know what she had said. Only Bobby didn't seem to care. She loved Bobby; she loved all her children and grandchildren. If there was only something she could do . . .

If she'd only cared about big events! If only she'd been smarter when she was young! And had read the first pages of the newspapers and all of the serious books Grandpa had read, instead of darning children's stockings in the evening. If she knew about things, maybe now she'd be able to see things ahead that would help people. But when she tried to see ahead—to big things—she saw only confusion, and never anything she could tell anyone. But, if the little things just stayed in their proper places . . .

Julia Latham was awfully worried about her mother. She talked things over with Evan.

"I don't know what we can do," she said. "Mother acts all right most of the time, but some of the things she says . . . And she has such odd explanations . . ."

"It's too bad," Evan said. "She's been such a wonderful person, but now . . . she's odd. There's no denying it. Perhaps if you saw Dr. Clement . . ."

"That's what I thought I'd do," Julia said. "He's known Mother longer than any of us, and being a doctor and all . . ."

Julia sat in the doctor's office and pretended to read the magazines that were as old as the cartoons said magazines in doctors' offices were. She tried to keep her mind on what she was reading and on the people in the office, until the nurse said Dr. Clement could see her.

Dr. Clement was hearty and red-faced, kind and wise.

"Nothing wrong, I hope," he said. "I saw Evan yesterday. He looked fine. And Grandma Quillan..."

"It's about Mother I want to see you," Julia said. "She's not really ill. She's always been so well, but here lately... we're worried about her."

"But she seemed fine! She stopped in just a few weeks ago, to tell me about the Bosleys down on Graham Road. Said the older boy was going to die, but that we could save the other two. As good a diagnosis as a doctor could have given. The boy died of rheumatic fever, but we're getting the other two on their feet. With the right care... She's a remarkable woman, Grandma Quillan. Many's the time she's helped me out."

"Mother is wonderful," said Julia. "You don't have to tell me that. But, well, like knowing about the Bosley boy... Maybe that isn't just what I mean. But her mind is all confused. She doesn't remember what happened yesterday, but something that happened twenty years ago..."

"Sure!" Dr. Clement said. "A lot of old people get that way. She asked me about that condition some time ago, but I wasn't certain she meant herself. Usually people don't realize their own condition. But I don't think that's serious."

"I'm glad of that," Julia said. "But that isn't all. She gets all kinds of hallucinations. She imagines things."

"What kind of things?"

"She thinks they've happened. But they haven't happened at all."

"Oh, I see!" Dr. Clement was more serious now.

"Sometimes she tries to pretend she didn't say them, and then gets more mixed up than ever. And sometimes she frightens us—things happen just the way she says they've already happened. I don't know if you see what I mean. A coincidence, of course, but it worries us."

"Of course," Dr. Clement said.

"And there's Bobby. She's devoted to him and he loves her, too, but he's only seven. And after school she's frequently alone with him..."

"Oh, I feel she's perfectly safe."

"I hope so, doctor. But we can't help worrying. The other day she said Bobby would cut himself with a new knife somebody had given him. And the next day he did cut himself. It may be the power of suggestion on a child, for Bobby hangs on every word she says. And she went to a friend of ours and complained about one of Winnie's boy friends. Isn't there something, doctor?"

"There aren't any drugs, if that's what you mean. I'm afraid it's senile dementia. But let me come in and look her over. She ought to have a good physical and mental check-up. And it may be, if you can't take care of her at home, that she ought to go to a sanitarium or a nursing home."

"There must be some other way!" Julia began to sob.

"Don't cry, child," said Dr. Clement. "If the old lady is... odd, it might be the best way all around. She'd be perfectly comfortable. There's a place just out of town run by trained nurses—a series of little white cottages and very pleasant. There are some old schoolteachers there—a nice class of people. I could send her to a hospital for observation, or have a couple of psychiatrists pass on her, unless she wants to go voluntarily. But don't worry about it until I talk to her. And don't let her know; I'll just drop in..."

The next afternoon, Dr. Clement came to call. Grandma liked and admired him. She gave him a glass of sherry and some homemade cookies.

"You work too hard," she said. "But I could have helped with Mrs. Bronson. She told me what you did for her."

"I didn't think you were up to it."

"I'm as good as I was twenty years ago."

"I hope you are, but you look . . . peaked. Maybe you need a good overhauling—a good tonic."

"Nonsense, never felt better!"

"Well, I'm going to look you over anyhow."

"If you've nothing better to do with your time."

He listened to Grandma's heart and her lungs. He asked her questions. And Grandma sat on the sofa, very still, like a little girl, and answered everything. Some of the questions were peculiar, but after all, he was her friend. When he'd first come to town, she'd thought he was a fine young man. Grandpa had thought so, too.

She hoped she said the right things. A couple of times she got so interested in what he was saying she sort of forgot. . . . Oh, well, he knew her pretty well. He'd understand.

They talked about little things then, people they both knew, the weather, spring was nearly here . . .

"I see you found your bag all right," said Grandma when Dr. Clement picked it up and started to leave.

"Found my bag?"

"Why, yes. Didn't you leave it at the Plunketts' out on Talbot Road?"

"Why, yes, of course," said Dr. Clement. But when he was in his car he had to admit that Mrs. Latham was right. For the old lady was odd when she spoke of old man Brewster, who had been dead for ten years, and of the Corning boy having measles when he wasn't even sick, and the lost bag. Why, he hadn't been near the Plunketts' in a couple of months! Maybe it would be better if the old lady went to a nursing home. The psychiatrists could examine her there. He'd make arrangements. . . .

Grandma was in her room when she heard a lot of excitement downstairs. She went down at once to find the

family assembled in the living room, and Winnie in tears.

"It's Sid Forrest!" she sobbed.

"So, they found out about him!" said Grandma.

"What do you mean?" Evan asked.

"About the checks and the girl in the bakery shop..."

"That's not it, Grandma! He eloped with Irene Jessup. If I'd only treated him nicer," Winnie wailed.

"Then they don't know about the checks?"

"What checks?" asked Julia.

"Why... why..." Grandma didn't go on.

"It's bad enough that he eloped," said Winnie, "without your saying terrible things..."

"Just forget him!" said her father. "There's other good fish!"

"Not in this town!" Winnie sobbed.

"You're only seventeen! You're just a child!" Julia said.

Grandma put her arms around her granddaughter and drew her down on the couch next to her.

"You'll meet someone else," she said, "a fine man, you'll see!"

"Will he be good-looking?"

"Yes," said Grandma, "and you'll be very much in love."

It wasn't until two days later that the family found out about the forged checks.

The very next day Grandma woke up earlier than usual. She dressed quickly, not in her neat housedress, but in her best black dress, with a fresh collar, and Grandpa's pin to hold it in place. There were so many things to do...

She straightened her bureau drawers, though they were already in apple-pie order—the pile of clean handkerchiefs; her collars; her decent, plain underthings.

"What are you doing?" Julia called. She was so wor-

ried about her mother—about Winnie—about so many things. But there was nothing she could do. . . .

"I thought I'd go over to Mrs. Hodges. Take her a few things. . . ."

"If you feel well enough. . . ."

"Never felt better in my life!"

Grandma made half a dozen neat little bundles, her pearl beads—not real, but mighty pretty; the cameo pin Julia thought old-fashioned; the bracelet with the onyx ornament. After the breakfast dishes were finished, and she'd made her bed, she'd give these little packets to some of her old friends. They weren't much. She didn't have much to give—for she wanted Julia and Winnie to have her ring and her gold bracelet, her other things. Well, these would bring a little pleasure—folks didn't have too much pleasure these days.

She was tired when she came home, but not too tired to help get dinner. She'd had a bite of lunch with Mrs. Burgess, to whom she'd given her real-lace collar-and-cuff set. Mrs. Burgess had always admired it, and she didn't have a lot, poor thing. Grandma smiled. She herself always had had nice things; not grand, exactly, but nice—the moonstone pin Julia liked to wear, the little, enameled watch Arthur's wife had given her, and the house. . . . Wouldn't it be awful to be old and not have things to give anyone?

In the excitement of finding out about Sid Forrest's activities, Winnie had already got over her heartbreak. She was a bit tragic at dinner, but Grandma gathered she was rather enjoying herself.

Grandma went to her room as soon as the dishes were in the cupboard. All of the running around and the excitement and all. . . .

She heard the telephone ring and Julia's voice answering:

"Dr. Clement, you went to the Plunketts' on Talbot Road? And you left your bag there. And you didn't know where you left it when you stopped in to see the Corning boy who had the measles. And then you remembered what Grandma Quillan had said. I don't quite understand, but of course I'll tell her. She's gone to bed now, but in the morning. . . ."

Grandma smiled to herself. So Dr. Clement had found out about the bag and the measles. They'd find out a lot of things. . . .

The telephone rang again. This time it was for Winnie. Her voice was excited and loud.

"Isn't it dreadful!" she said. "But I'm not surprised at all. Grandma told me weeks ago what would happen—warned me! She's got second sight or something. She can tell fortunes. She told me I was going to marry a rich, handsome man and be happy! Sure! Come over tomorrow and she'll tell you everything. . . ."

That would be terrible, almost the last straw! Grandma smiled wryly. But she knew she wouldn't have to worry about it. There didn't have to be a last straw!

Julia and Evan were fine . . . and Winnie, once she got some sense into her head . . . and Arthur's family . . . none of them needed her any more . . . not even Bobby, who was growing up.

Grandma puttered around the room, arranging things the way she wanted them, climbed into the old-fashioned double bed she'd kept for herself when Julia refurnished the house.

Very carefully, so as not to break them—as if it mattered any more—she put her glasses on the little bed table, turned out the light and closed her eyes. She was never one for reading in bed or lying awake at night.

She'd always been too tired for that. And then she said the prayers she'd learned from her own mother, the way she always said them, "Our Father, which art in Heaven" and "Now I lay me down to sleep."

She wished she could have helped them more . . . Julia and Evan . . . Winnie, with her new idea about fortune-telling . . . all of them . . . if there only had been some way . . .

She wiped a tear from her cheek with the back of her hand. The views from the balloon—the long-ago view of yesterday, and the view of today, and tomorrow—all began to merge and grow dim. Grandma gave a long sigh of relief as she fell asleep. There wasn't a thing she had to worry about any more.

ANGIE LEE'S FORTUNE

ALL of Angie Lee's friends, and especially the girls who worked with her at Blakeley's are still talking about Angie Lee and her fortune—and they'll probably keep on talking about her for some time. Not too much happens to the girls who work at Blakeley's.

It all started the day the girls had lunch at the Witch's Caldron. The lunch there is the sketchiest possible. You couldn't get less for your money if you made a special effort in that direction. You get a choice of soup or tomato juice—both beautifully colored and tasting slightly of some foreign substance besides water. This is followed by a plate smeared with a pastelike mixture which contains, on occasion, bits of chicken, veal, or ham, together with several slivers of rather brown string beans, and one very white boiled potato.

Accompanying this are two triangles of bread, their corners already turned up and dry, and an almost transparent rectangle of butter. For dessert there is a choice of ice cream, measured with a scoop that must be at least an inch in diameter, an infinitesimal helping of chocolate pudding, or a tiny, quivering bit of gelatin.

It's an excellent place to go if you're on a starvation diet—which isn't the reason the girls go there, at all. For, after luncheon, you get your fortunes told, for free, with, of course, just the necessary tip to the fortuneteller.

The girls from Blakeley's had had remarkable luck with Madame Olga, the fattest of the Witch's Caldron's sooth-sayers. Madame Olga had predicted, with only the slightest of hints from Pearl Morrison, that her beau, Claude Harris, would make up with her before Christmas. And what happened? Well, though Pearl had had no indications in the world that Claude would even speak to her again, she'd gone ahead and bought Christmas presents for him—gloves, a scarf, and a fountain pen guaranteed to write for at least three generations.

And when Christmas Eve came and there was still no word from Claude, Pearl had not lost faith at all. She had delivered the Christmas box, all wrapped in red, white, green, and blue ribbons—the blue was a concession to Claude's past association with the United States Navy—to the place where Claude lived; after all, a girl has got to help the gods.

And that night, right on the nose, Claude had appeared at the house where she shared an apartment with Belle Stuart and delivered *his* present—a box of rather uncertain chocolates and a gilt belt which didn't quite go around Pearl's not-too-slim waist. But it was the sentiment, Pearl felt. They made up immediately, and are going to get married any day, now.

Besides this, Madame Olga predicted that Rosemary Strubbe would find something valuable; and not a month afterward Rosemary, who never in her life had ever found anything before, found the following items in a small purse without any address in it: two quarters, three pennies, a four-leaf clover in a plastic holder, an automatic pencil, a very cute little compact that was good, once she put a new puff in it and had the catch fixed, and a nail file.

Madame Olga told Jessie Mallory she'd hear from an

old friend. Soon after, Jessie got a post card from Robert Henry, whom she hadn't heard from in a year, and didn't like very well, but the prediction had not included affection.

The day of Angie Lee's fortune there were six girls from Blakeley's at one of the big tables. Pearl and Rosemary, who were fiends for future information. Martha Bales, Amelia Crane, Freda Harper, and Angie, herself. They all finished their luncheon and waited for the fortuneteller. And then the blow fell.

The hostess came over to their table. "I noted your request for Madame Olga," she said. "But, alas, she is no longer with the Witch's Caldron. She has gone to Arizona."

"You wouldn't tell us if she was in town," pouted Freda. "Now we'll never locate her!"

"I'm telling you the truth, on my word of honor!" said the hostess with great dignity and vehemence. "There was something unforeseen came up in her home town—a family illness or something." Before the girls had time to ponder on the inability of the great Madame Olga to look into her own destiny, the hostess went on, "But we have a much better fortuneteller now. All of the girls are crazy over her. You will be, too."

"Not Madame Hortense. I won't have her! Not a thing she ever told came true!" said Amelia Crane.

"No, this is a new girl—though a lot of our patrons swear by Madame Hortense. This one just came yesterday. She really is remarkable. I know you'll be satisfied. Her name is Madame Lucretia."

The girls looked at each other and groaned. But there was little they could do about it. They had already eaten and paid for their luncheon. All that remained now was to hand the little slip they got, when they paid, to Madame Lucretia, listen to her prognostications, tip her as gener-

ously as seemed suitable, and hurry back, only half an hour or so late, to Blakeley's.

Their first glance at Madame Lucretia was not reassuring. She was a thin, dark little woman, with a jutting chin and too few teeth. She had some sort of peculiar accent and rather mumbled her words.

Amelia Crane was first, because her seat was most convenient for Madame Lucretia. The new (to the Witch's Caldron) fortuneteller spread out some very soiled cards which she undoubtedly had used in many past performances, glared at them intensely, and then looked at Amelia's palm.

"You very sensitive," she said. "I see that. You no like to have feelings hurt. You give to others and get no returns." None of the girls, including Amelia, had suspected any of this. They looked at one another and smiled. She was going to be awful!

Madame Lucretia gave forth some pretty banal information, and the girls fought against their natural desire to believe and their doubt of Madame Lucretia's powers to look into the future. As a matter of fact, she told little about the future but kept to rather vague character analysis. Martha Bales grew more and more contemptuous of the soothsayer's prowess, and began to giggle and interject rude remarks long before her own turn came.

Martha was the beauty of the group. Her hair was more blond, more waved, her eyes larger and more blue, her mouth softer and more sensuous and scarlet. Besides this, she had a sweetly rounded little figure and an impudent and confident way with her. Her boy friends, and they were numerous, often told her she ought to be in the movies, and she'd made rather ineffectual stabs at getting movie scouts interested.

Perhaps Madame Lucretia lost patience. Perhaps she actually thought she saw, in cards or hands, what she said was revealed to her.

"You are apt to be deceptive," she intoned, toothlessly, to Martha Bales. "Do not deceive your boy friends or you will come only to grief! You may lose great future happiness through deception."

"Don't you see anything good?" asked Martha, glancing slyly at the other girls, all of whom envied her popularity.

Madame Lucretia looked at the girl's wax-doll prettiness. "Oh, you'll get along all right. But not in the big way you might have got along if it weren't for the faults I just told you about." Her voice grew low: "You no tell truth!"

All of the girls smiled and nodded. Truth was not Martha's outstanding characteristic. After all, when you meet a new fellow there's no use sticking too closely to facts when the facts are as drab as a family in Corona and a job at Blakeley's.

Angie was the last to put out her palm. Now, there was no getting around it, Angie was nothing spectacular to look at. She wasn't exactly plain, because her face was really rather nicely formed and her eyes were alive and eager. But her mouth was a trifle on the large side and she made it up none too well, and her figure, though rather good, needed better dresses to bring out its best points. And of course she couldn't afford good permanents or the proper washes to bring out the highlights in her hair. The girls all liked Angie, but they just never thought of asking her to go with them on blind dates.

Madame Lucretia looked at Angie's palm and at Angie. Maybe she felt she'd been too harsh with Martha. After all, a fortuneteller keeps her job by foretelling pleasant things. Or maybe she felt sorry for Angie. Or maybe she really thought she saw something. Anyhow, she closed

her eyes, sucked in her breath, and said, with greater animation than she had shown, "I see a fine future for you! Nothing more to worry about! A fine husband! A great and unexpected fortune."

"You mean I'll marry a rich man?" asked Angie, who had never known a rich man in her whole life.

"Oh, no, you'll marry a poor man, but the fortune will be sudden and unexpected, and surprising in every way."

"It certainly will be surprising," said Angie.

"Will the man marry her for her money?" asked Martha, laughing again.

"Oh, no!" said Madame Lucretia. "It is true love, two hearts coming together!"

"How beautiful!" said Martha.

Madame Lucretia gave her a cold look, rose heavily, for one so thin, and left the table. The fortunes were over.

Angie couldn't help but be quite set up by the fortune, even while the girls teased her. She wondered if Madame Lucretia really meant what she had said. And if she did mean it, could she mean Hugh Johnson?

For a year now, ever since she'd come to work at Blakeley's, Angie had had a secret passion for Hugh. It was so secret, in fact, that Angie hardly admitted it to herself. She wouldn't have let the girls find it out for worlds; they would have teased her unmercifully, and Hugh might even have found out how she felt.

Hugh didn't look like most girls' idea of a glamour boy. In fact, there isn't a single movie star whom he resembled in any way, though Angie had the illusion that if he were taller and his hair were darker, there might have been just a trifle of a resemblance to Jimmy Stewart. It was resemblance enough to make her rush to every picture in which Jimmy Stewart appeared, even to the reissuing of his old films at the neighborhood playhouses.

Hugh was a rather shy and quiet young man who

worked in the accounting department. It is quite possible that none of the other girls even noticed him, for certainly none of them ever mentioned him or made their usual advances. Hugh lived with his mother and sister in Astoria. His mother was not strong and his sister's job was one of those half-time and half-paid affairs, because she had to be at home a lot with her mother. All of Hugh's small salary was needed at home, so even if he had had any desire to shower attentions on any girl it would have been impossible.

Angie knew about Hugh and his family. She'd got out the facts, bit by bit, when she saw him at Blakeley's or when she met him on the street, not quite by accident, and walked to the store or to the subway, depending on the time of day, with him. He was swell, Hugh was! He always had something pleasant and cheerful to say. One day they talked about books, and not a week later Hugh brought her a book to read that he'd got out of the library. She didn't have to read it quickly, either, because he still had over a week's time on it.

One day they met at a nearby cafeteria. They were both late to lunch, so Angie hadn't been able to go with the other girls. They picked out things together, laughing over their mutual tastes in food, and then sat at the same table. Hugh wanted to take Angie's check, but she wouldn't let him.

"It isn't as if you'd invited me to have a meal with you," Angie told him.

"I see what you mean," said Hugh. "I wish I could eat out more. There are so many places I read about in the newspapers that I'd like to try, but my sister always has dinner ready for the three of us when I get home."

Angie knew what he meant. For Angie had to give most of her money home; her father didn't do too well, and her

brother Bill was married and had his own family to look after now.

Curiously enough, Angie lived in Corona, too, though she and Martha didn't live very close together. And Hugh in Astoria—right in the same part of New York's suburbs. Funny! Three separate lives. Working all day at Blakeley's and living in the same section of Long Island—and not actually touching one another at all. Anyhow, that's what Angie thought at the time. Heaven knows, she *wanted* her life to touch Hugh's, but she didn't know what she could do about it. She often found him looking at her. And they'd smile at each other. She sometimes thought that Hugh went out of his way to see her just as she knew she went out of her way to see him. But when the obstacle is money and a mother to support and a sense of responsibility, there doesn't seem any way to jump over it. . . .

In spite of the predictions of Madame Lucretia, Martha had a fine time. She always had a better time than any of the girls at Blakeley's. If, in retelling her adventures, she added a bit of color and excitement, none of them knew or cared. Even vicarious thrills were better than none at all. All of them enjoyed Martha's visits to the Latin Quarter and the Stork and the Copacabana, even while they wished that they might be going in her place .

None of the girls even wondered at the fact that Martha's escorts were forever changing or that none of them ever seemed to consider matrimony. Going to night clubs and the theaters and seeing famous people, the way Martha did, seemed quite enough. Certainly better, as far as they were concerned, than if Martha had married and disappeared altogether.

Martha didn't tell them about meeting Mr. Pigge,

though she didn't even know his name until their last date. His name was so terrible she didn't even believe it was his own. No man is named Pigge! Or is he? In the second place, he was neither young nor glamorous. In fact, Mr. Pigge was quite old.

She just happened into the hotel lobby, the way she so often happened into it, looking, she hoped, for all the world like a girl waiting for her date to show up. She walked around, always keeping pretty close to one spot, and glancing at the wrist watch that Mr. Halliday, who long since had passed out of Martha's particular sight, had given her Christmas before last. It had worked before and it undoubtedly would work again. Pretty soon some young man would say, "Looks as if your date's stood you up." And Martha would smile her prettiest and say, "It certainly looks that way, doesn't it!" And the young man would say, "Well, isn't that an odd and pleasing coincidence? I'm without a date, too. What about having a drink with me?" Then Martha would look coy and say, "I wish I could, but I don't drink with strangers." The answer to that was: "But I'm not a stranger. Just try me and see!" Or something like that.

They'd go into the bar for a drink, and, likely as not, she'd find out the man was from out of town and lonely, and they were all set for a pleasant evening. Sometimes even for more than one evening.

The date with Mr. Pigge wasn't like that at all. Martha looked at her watch for a full half-hour, in one hotel. And then moved on to a second hotel and did the watch trick. Nothing doing! Not a single man with an invitation! Next, she went into a bar, as if she were expecting to meet someone there. All right to do occasionally, but not too often in one bar. Still no invitation; just stares, and not too pleasant ones.

She walked into the lobby of the hotel and stood there, just about decided to go home, dateless, when this old man appeared in front of her. She hadn't even noticed him. He was so old his shoulders were bent and he sort of trembled. He was nearly bald, and what hair he did have was white. He was not Martha's idea of a date at all!

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I'm very lonely, tonight, and it would be most kind of you if you would honor an old man by dining with him."

Martha wasn't used to such language—sort of slow and elegant, and yet almost as if he were being sarcastic. She wanted to say, "How dare you!" But she didn't have a date, and what did she have to lose?

"Say, that will be all right!" she said, and smiled.

She couldn't tell if the old fellow had money or not; he wasn't dressed very well, but, on the other hand, he wasn't poorly dressed, either. Sort of decent, she guessed.

"Have you any preference as to where we dine?" he asked.

She said, no, anyplace was all right with her.

"I know a very nice place I think you'll like," he said.

She felt that this would be a tip-off, but the place he picked out didn't tell her a great deal. It was on a side street in what had evidently been an old brownstone house and, like the old man, it was only a little shabby. And yet the prices were terribly high. The food, she knew, was good, though it wasn't exactly the kind she liked. But, from past experience, she knew it was the sort you were supposed to like, sort of odd-flavored, but all right.

The old man asked questions, but not in a prying way. She started to make up things, the way she usually did, and then she thought, why bother? She wasn't trying to pull a fast one on *him*—just an old man who had asked her to dinner.

"I live with my family in Corona—that's on Long Island,"

she said. "We haven't any too much money, but we get along all right." That was certainly true! Then she told him about Blakeley's, and got quite a laugh out of him when she told about the girls. Funny, what some people think is amusing! After dinner he said, "I know you will forgive me if I don't escort you home."

"Sure; that's all right," said Martha, who hadn't the least idea in the world that he was even thinking of taking her way out to Corona.

"Will you honor me by dining with me a week from tonight?" he asked.

"I'd be delighted," said Martha. "I've had a very enjoyable evening!" She could act elegant, too.

"The same place, then?"

"Yes, indeed," Martha said.

He gave her five dollars for taxicab fare, which surprised her. She thanked him nicely when she accepted it, but of course she took a subway train home.

She didn't tell the girls about the old man. Certainly not! They'd think she was losing her charms, having to eat with an old codger like that. Oh, he was all right—didn't get fresh or make advances or anything—but why start letting them think she'd do such a thing? So, the next day, she told all about her dinner, describing the man as young and handsome, a replica of the man she'd really had dinner with two days before.

The next week she met the old man again. She had decided that if a better date came up, she'd take it, of course, but nothing else came up. So there she was, only five minutes late. And there he was—holding a little flower box.

The box contained funny-looking little yellow flowers. She'd rather hoped for orchids. But the dinner was good—

an Italian restaurant this time. Again five dollars for a taxicab, and another date for the week following.

"I don't get it!" Martha thought. "I never came up in front of anything like this before. He hasn't got the least bit fresh, but he's bound to be up to something. I guess I'd better watch my step, maybe not see him any more."

It was kind of silly to see him. But the dinner was good and there was always that taxi money. . . .

She met him the next week and after dinner he took her to a concert. That was awful! Long, long pieces of music by just four men. A string quartette, he said. She wouldn't put up with much more of this!

As a matter of fact, she did put up with only one more date, and even that surprised her. The last time there was just dinner.

"Do you know, we've never even exchanged names," said the old man. "I should have told you my name long ago, but it seemed such a pleasant adventure, as it was. . . . My name is Pigge, James C. Pigge—spelled, P-I-G-G-E."

Martha had to laugh. She couldn't believe that was really his name! She wondered why he bothered with names at all.

"My name is—" She hesitated. Why tell that old man her name? He must be up to something, asking her name after he'd bought her four meals, stretched over that many weeks. What if one of her boy friends or the girls at the office knew she'd been out with the old bird, after all of the glamour dates she'd told them about?

"My name is Angie Lee," she said. . . . Let Angie get the blame, if anyone did. Angie, who didn't have enough guts to get a date of her own, but was always sort of mooning around.

"What a nice name," said the old man—Mr. Pigge! "Old-fashioned and quaint. It quite suits you! Angie Lee!"

Was he kidding! Martha Bales old-fashioned and quaint! That was a laugh, all right.

He made a dinner engagement for the next week, but Martha had found a younger and more interesting admirer by that time, one who wanted to date her that very night, so she stayed far away from the hotel lobby.

A week later she thought of him, and went by the hotel, just in case. She'd apologize and say that her mother was ill if, by any chance, he was there. He wasn't there. She never saw him again. She thought of him a couple of times and had to laugh—those dull dinners with that old man! She didn't need a meal that bad! Not for years, anyhow! Younger and more interesting men came along. She put Mr. Pigge entirely out of her mind. . . .

And then it happened. The office was in an uproar. Pearl and Amelia rushed over to her with the news:

"The letter just came—registered mail! For Angie! It's the most thrilling thing you ever heard! An old man left her fifteen thousand dollars in his will!"

"What old man? What do you mean?"

They didn't know much. Just what the letter said. Angie was taking the afternoon off and was going to see the lawyer. Just some old man Angie knew—though she couldn't remember him very well in the excitement—and it was actually fifteen thousand dollars! They had *seen* the letter!

The next day, and the days that followed, all of the girls knew all about it. A certain Mr. James C. Pigge, seventy-eight years old, had died in his home in Seventy-seventh Street, and he'd left a will. And in it was one paragraph that was devoted entirely to Angie Lee:

"To my young friend, Angie Lee of Corona, Long Island, business address, Blakeley's, who is as charming and quaint and old-fashioned as her name, I leave fifteen thousand dollars in memory of her kindness in cheering up a lonely old man."

That was all! The girls chattered like mad about it: "The tax was paid by the estate. That was in the will, too, farther on. All bequests were to be paid net, tax free, so she gets the whole fifteen thousand dollars."

"What did you say the man's name was?" asked Martha.

"Pigge! Can you beat it! James C. Pigge! A very rich old man, it seems—and no family. Left a lot of money to charities and servants and his secretary and to people he didn't know very well."

"What!" said Martha. "Pigge!"

"Did you know him?" asked Rosemary.

"Know him! I'm the girl he left the money to! I mean, I am the one who knew him! I had dinner with him time after time—"

She tried to make it sound convincing, but she knew it didn't, even as she said it.

"How you go on!" said Amelia. "Snap out of it, kid! Angie's money has gone to your brain. Seventy-eight years old, they said. You're always saying you wouldn't look at a man over thirty-five. When Mary Woodrock got married last year you said she was marrying her grandfather, and Jesse was only forty-one! You never told us anything about any old man you went out to dinner with."

Martha faced Angie. "You never knew any old man named Pigge," she said.

"I—I guess I did," said Angie, who was thoroughly confused by this time.

"You guess you did—my eye!"

"I mean, I knew a lot of old men—"

"You did kindnesses to them, I guess."

"Well, lots of times I've helped old men across streets. Or—talked to them on busses."

"And they'd give you fifteen thousand dollars for that, I suppose."

"It looks that way. They say one old lady gave an usher

thousands and thousands because she used to get her seats at the movies every week—”

“How do you think Pigge found out your name?”

“Oh, there are ways, I guess.”

“And that you live in Corona and worked at Blakeley’s?”

“That’s no mystery. Everybody knows that who knows me, I guess.”

Martha tried to tell the truth, and not a soul would listen to her. She went to one of the restaurants where she had dined with the old man and tried to get someone there to identify her, but no one remembered seeing her at all. They didn’t even remember seeing Mr. Pigge.

She found out the name of the law firm handling the estate, and went in to see them.

The office was full of worn black leather chairs and superior, suspicious old men. They saw no reason to think that Mr. Pigge had made a mistake. They couldn’t believe that it was a case of mistaken identity. After all, the description, “charming, quaint and old-fashioned,” didn’t seem to suit Martha Bales very well, while it did describe Miss Angie Lee.

“But I am the girl!” she screamed at them. “I gave Angie’s name just—just for fun! I’m the girl he meant to leave the money to.”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to bring more substantial proof,” the oldest man said. “We have talked to Miss Lee and her family. We are quite satisfied.”

And that was that! There wasn’t a thing Martha could do about it.

Angie wondered if Martha was telling the truth. Sometimes she almost thought she was, though all of the girls laughed and laughed and told her not to pay any attention. After all, there wasn’t a single day that Martha hadn’t

told exactly where she'd been the night before, and had she ever talked about seeing an old man named Pigge?

As time passed, Angie remembered more and more occasions when she'd been kind and thoughtful to old men. Why, of course! And she continued to be.

At that, she had other things on her mind besides thinking about old men.

"I guess you're going to leave Blakeley's," Hugh said, after things began to settle down a little.

"Not at all," said Angie. "I'm going to stay right here."

"I thought—with all that money—"

"No, I'm going to put some of it in a house for my father and mother to live in, and the rest—"

"If something like that happened to me," said Hugh, "it could make so many other things happen. Now you're farther away from me than ever."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Well, I had hoped that, someday, things might get a little better, and maybe we could go places together or—or maybe things might change—but now you've got the money—"

"I don't see how that is going to hurt anything. It ought to help instead," said Angie. "I'm buying a two-family house. Maybe your mother and sister . . ."

They talked about it, that night, in the same cafeteria where they'd eaten before. It all seemed quite possible. If Hugh knew that his mother and sister were taken care of, there wasn't a reason in the world why he couldn't feel free. And if Angie's mother, who had a lot of time, really wouldn't mind . . . Why, then Fred's sister could take a full-time job and there'd be enough money, if they lived in the two-family house. It looked as if things might work out all right. . . .

Martha left Blakeley's. The girls kidded her too much.

Besides, there were a lot of other places to work, places where there were nice young men, not awful goons like that Hugh in the accounting department.

After she'd gone, Rosemary suddenly thought of the fortuneteller at the Witch's Caldron. She rushed to the other girls. "Don't you remember what she said—Martha was deceptive—and she certainly was, making up that she had been the one who knew Piggel! The ideal! And Angie coming into a fortune, and now going steady with Hugh and all! Why, Angie Lee's fortune came true!"

They rushed over to the Witch's Caldron at noon, taking the new girl, Susan Claflin, with them. They could hardly wait until the meager lunch was finished. As soon as they'd eaten their skimpy desserts they paid their bills and got the slips that entitled them to have their fortunes told. They called for the hostess.

"We'd like Madame Lucretial" they all clamored at once.

"Madame Lucretial" The hostess was puzzled.

"Sure!" explained Rosemary. "You know, we all had her after Madame Olga went away. A little old lady—not too many teeth. Don't tell me she isn't—"

"Oh, I know who you mean! Oh, no, she's not here."

"She's not!"

"She stayed only a couple of days. That's why I didn't know who you meant. None of the girls liked her. Said she was cross and just muttered a lot of stuff—never did tell them what was going to happen in the future."

"She was swell!" said Amelia, forgetting that they hadn't liked her at all at the time.

"There's a new one," said the hostess. "Madame Juliet. Uses a crystal ball. Everyone thinks she's wonderful. I'll send her over as soon as she's finished with the two ladies she has now."

They waited, thinking silently, each one, that probably

it was no use. They wouldn't learn about the future from Madame Juliet. They probably wouldn't learn from anyone. And yet—look what had happened to Angie! They were still young. Their whole future lay ahead. Anything could happen! And maybe, each thought, maybe this is *my* day!

THE MISSES GRANT

ONE of the compensations of time is that, if you wait long enough, you begin to hear the end of stories. So, just the other day, I heard the completed history of the Misses Grant—though I had thought I knew all about them when I was very young.

They were called, alternately, the Grant girls and the Misses Grant. I can't really imagine that they were ever young, though both titles seem to be an assumption of youth. When I was a little girl they seemed old. And, even in those days, they lived on the edge of town, although there were several other houses near by—and similar to their own. Huge and very ugly early Victorian houses, brave with lace wood ornamentation around the porches, unnecessary and useless cupolas or more elegant mansard roofs.

There had been an effort, when the Grant girls really were young, to make that part of the town very "stylish," but nothing ever came of it, and the town developed in the opposite direction, toward the river.

The Grant girls belonged to one of the town's oldest families—and they were the last members of it. They were aloof, superior, disdainful, proud—and very poor. Their parents had died many years before, and an older brother, a black sheep, had been killed in a shooting scrape in the wrong part of town. Now there were just the two of

them left, and they lived all alone, except for an old Negro servant.

"Poor, but proud," the townspeople said. And smiled a bit patronizingly as they said it. The other old families were indulgent enough and respected the Grant girls' peculiarities. The newer families, living in neat little cottages and doing their own housework, rather sneered at the sisters, partly because of the way they lived, but, most of all, because they kept a servant. So poor—and yet they couldn't do their own housework! You always saw the servant when you drove past the old house. She'd be working in the garden or cleaning the steps or sweeping the long open porch. And the newer people, seeing her, didn't like it at all.

My grandmother used to take me to see the Grant girls, occasionally. We would drive out for tea, and on the way out Grandma would caution me. "When tea is served, take only one cake! You know, people like the Grant girls can't afford to fill up a growing girl like you. When you get home you can have some of the pecan cookies, if you're a good girl."

There were several other families we visited in town where I got the same warning, so I understood. Anyhow, the tea cakes were never very good—sort of hard and tasteless, so I didn't mind having only one of them.

The house had the musty smell I've always associated with old Victorian houses. The furniture was carved rosewood and the haircloth sofa was so sleek that I had a hard time not sliding off it. There was a little worn red velvet chair that I liked best of all and I usually sat there. In front of the fireplace was a black velvet screen painted with cattails, and the walls were covered with a faded tan and gold scrolled paper.

Miss Matilda was taller than Miss Althea. Otherwise they were about the same. Neat, thin, little old ladies.

They always wore black dresses, with lace collars caught in front with large gold brooches, and they wore their hair neatly parted in the center with little buns twisted behind. They had thin hands which they used a lot in aimless movements.

The talk was nearly always the same and I grew restless before the end of the visit. The Misses Grant would deplore the fact that Family no longer counted in our town. Why, when they read the society columns in the newspaper they scarcely recognized a single name! All of those new Northern people with money, moving in and spoiling things! For their part, they never expected to recognize socially a single one of those new families. The fact that the new families owned all of the best houses and the new shops and factories and had organized a country club and a commercial club and had built motion-picture houses and a new theater and were having a mighty pleasant time of it never occurred to them.

The Negro servant, very neat in a black dress and white apron, with a big bow behind—like all of our Negro servants—brought in the tea and the cakes and I always remembered to take only one and to say a polite, “No, thank you!” when they were offered to me again. And there was more talk about how our town was going to the dogs socially, with no one to keep up the town’s traditions. And then Grandma and I would leave, promising to come very soon again. Grandma had known their mother, and was very acceptable as a member of the town’s right set.

On the way home, we’d talk about them. And my grandmother, who was a very wise woman, would say, “You see, they haven’t had much out of life—and all they have now is their pride. It may be their own fault, but we can’t decide who is to blame—we have to humor them a little.

Pride isn't an easy thing to live with when there is nothing else to go with it."

As I grew older, I rather forgot about the Grant girls. There seemed to me so many more important things to think about. Wanting to write and go to the city and wanting to have a good time and be popular with the boys. And thinking about Life. I wrote and I dreamed and I had a good time. Then I actually did get to New York. And beyond sending them Christmas notes—they thought cards were in bad taste—I put the Grant girls out of mind until the other day, when I learned what happened.

The Grant girls had continued to live in the old house. And that part of the town became less and less important—for it was flat and ugly out there. Arlington Addition, with all of its neat little cottages, grew out south of the town. And the big, new houses were built on the river. And the factories, put up by the Northern capital the Grant girls despised, were built out on the west side. So on the north side were just the deserted houses that once had been grand—and the old house where the Grant girls lived.

As the sisters grew older, the house took on a haunted look, even while they made futile efforts to keep it in repair. It needed paint—but they didn't have enough money to paint it, so the once-white house became faded and gray, and the roof was black and uneven. But they kept up appearances as well as they could. The Negro servant could still be seen taking care of the flowers or sweeping the porch. Or, as you drove by, you might see her brown face peering out of the window.

Fewer people went to see the Grant girls. The new people—not so new any more—thought of them as eccentric old ladies. Members of the old families remembered to call once in a while, but memory played tricks when there

were no rewards except listening to the snobbish complaints of two self-centered old ladies and having a cup of weak tea and a stale cookie.

Dr. Bristol called to see Miss Althea. He was one of the newer and younger doctors, and he went there only because Mr. Ballard, the grocer, asked him to go. "They haven't a telephone," Ballard said. "Miss Matilda stopped my delivery boy, who just happened to be going out that way to some people who have a farm a couple of miles from there—hadn't passed there in weeks—and said they'd like a doctor. If you'd stop in—"

So Dr. Bristol stopped in. He was young, energetic, forward-looking. He worked hard. And he resented idle old ladies who had never done a useful thing in their entire lives. Most of all, he admitted later, he resented the servant.

"My wife was doing all of her own work," he said. "And with three children and my hours, she had her hands full. Those old ladies never did a lick of work in their lives, and I'd heard they were always talking about Family and about their servant!"

Dr. Bristol couldn't know about the Grant girls' pride—and the fact that having a servant was so important to them—the last outward sign of position and standing that was left to them. Having a servant meant, to the Grant girls, that they still had affluence, were still Southern ladies. Only people like my grandmother could have told him—and no one told him at all.

So Dr. Bristol treated Miss Althea. She just had a bad cold. He told her to be careful and left a bottle of tonic and some vitamin pills. He stopped in, a couple of times after that when he happened to be passing, and found them all right—that is, as right as they could be—two frail and proud old ladies and a disdainful Negro maid.

When the storm came a lot of people in the country suffered. Roofs leaked and children and older people, too, caught colds and influenza. Dr. Bristol had his hands full. It wasn't until everything was peaceful and in hand again that he thought of the Grant girls. He didn't approve of them, but he was a good doctor, and they were old and not strong. So he drove out to see them, making a special trip, for there was no one within miles of the old house any more. The farm people had moved into town for the winter, after the storm.

He found things far worse than he had expected. Miss Althea opened the door for him—and he saw that she was ill. And Miss Matilda was so weak she couldn't even sit up in bed.

Dr. Bristol told me his bit of the patchwork that made up the lives of the Misses Grant, when I last visited my home town.

"I did what I could for them," he said. "If they had been stronger I could have got them to the hospital right away, but Miss Matilda was too weak to be moved. As it was, I gave them some shots and waited. But I didn't have enough medicine with me—and I couldn't take a chance and drive back, leaving them alone in their condition. If they had had a telephone, it would have been an easy matter to have got an ambulance or a nurse and the proper medicine. As it was, I heated water, did what I could.

"You'll have to send the maid over to Branson's. He is the nearest neighbor with a telephone," he told Miss Althea. "It's not an easy trip—but she ought to be able to make it. I can't leave Miss Matilda. It's lucky I'm here. She's got a chance if I stay, if I can get the right drugs for her. You can't go, Miss Althea! You're in no condition

for that walk! Couldn't possibly make it! Sending your servant is the only way—the one chance!”

Miss Althea looked at him. Didn't answer. He thought she didn't understand. He repeated the demand.

Miss Althea shook her head. Then held it high. The Grant pride! “The servant can't go!” she said. “I'll go, instead.”

“Your going is out of the question! Sending that old servant is the only solution. What have you got her around for, if she can't go on an errand at a crucial time like this? She's here—I know that. Some people saw her sweeping the porch, just the other day.” He didn't tell her how the people had laughed at the old sisters and their servant.

“The maid can't go!” Miss Althea's face was pale, but her head was held high.

“You don't understand . . .”

“I understand well enough. That's settled,” she said.

Dr. Bristol shook his head when he told me this. “There she stood! Proud. Stubborn. No explanation at all. She said the servant couldn't go and that was that. I didn't see the servant. Guess she had sense enough to stay out of my way.”

“I did what I could for them,” he said. “Then I had to leave. I had other sick people to look after. I came back as soon as I could make it. But it was too late. Miss Matilda died two days later. We got Miss Althea into a hospital in town—and she lived for a month—frail and weak. She hadn't had the right nourishment in months—and after her sister died, she lost interest in things. If they had let us know they didn't have any money and how things were we could have sent visiting nurses or got them a warm room in town. Frankly, there's always been something I didn't quite understand. The servant's dis-

appearing when we needed her—and the sisters' never letting on how poor they were."

If Grandma had been there, I think she could have made it clear to him. But I knew I couldn't make him see. I wouldn't have understood, myself, if Grandma hadn't told me so much about the Grant girls and pride a long time ago.

I didn't even need the final bit—though it did finish the patchwork—the pattern of the Grant girls and their teas and their servant and their talk about keeping up position and Family.

I was having tea with Mrs. Gerrard. A large tea, with plates piled high with beaten biscuits filled with slices of "old" baked ham, and little cakes syrupy with honey and full of butter, spices and pecans.

We talked of the town. Of the new people, and the parties they gave. And of the few old families who still remained and who were marrying so rapidly into the newer families that, before long, not a single old family would remain.

"You heard about the Grant girls?" Mrs. Gerrard asked, finally.

"Yes, Dr. Bristol told me they had died," I said.

"Poor old souls! They died as they lived, clinging to what was left of their position and dignity," she said.

"You mean being there alone, and not asking for help?"

"Partly that. Outwardly that, anyhow. As far as Dr. Bristol and the town knows, anyhow."

"There was more?"

"One thing more. A thing we had to let them keep. Something they'd worked so hard for. You know what having a servant meant to them?"

Yes, I knew. I nodded. "A symbol."

"It wasn't until—afterwards—that we found out. We never told. I wouldn't tell you, except because of your grandmother, you're Old South and will understand. I went there with Rose Mitchell. We had to put things in order. And there—in a drawer, we found—a pitiful little bundle. A box of something they'd used to black their faces. An old maid's dress. An apron. A bandana. From the road, if anyone looked in, it seemed as if they'd had a servant."

"Later," Mrs. Gerrard went on, "I found out from my own Molly that Emily, the old colored woman who worked for them, had died months before. Think of those poor old things, taking turns blacking their faces, so that the world would think..."

"And the world didn't care. And they died."

"They'd probably have died, anyhow, before too long. Wasn't it better—I think they would have thought so, anyhow—not taking charity? And keeping up what they thought was their position, the big house and a maid to wait on them. Pride..."

FUR FLIES

MISS CAROLYN dipped her firm, cool fingers in fragrant cream and massaged and kneaded my face with vigorous and rhythmic strokes. I'm not sure that visiting a beauty parlor actually does anything constructive to my face, but it does do something to my morale. I'm lapped in luxury and given a sense of well-being and a hope that maybe, just maybe, I'll look a little better. Surely all that is worth the price of a treatment—with Miss Carolyn's conversation as lagniappe.

The Emily Deane Beauty Salon isn't the largest in New York, but it gets its share of the estimated \$600,000,000 that American women spend each year on cosmetics and toilet preparations. It has seven floors devoted to body treatments and face treatments, with exercise and massage and baths and lamps and rollers, permanents and bleaches and rinses, all prettily awaiting you on its various floors. There's a restaurant with fruit juices and raw vegetables and other things that are supposedly good for you. And a shop where the creams and handbags and negligees and perfumes are not good for your pocketbook, but may be good for your soul. The whole thing is a glitter of mirrors and chromium, with thick, off-white rugs and pale walls and matching curtains pulled across windows to cut off the cruel daylight. On each floor are miniature treatment rooms as luxurious as a boudoir of a courtesan in the court of Louis

XVI—and far more convenient and sanitary. Each regular customer asks for Miss Hazel or Miss Carolyn or Miss Joan, or one of the other attendants, each a skillful masseuse with trained fingers—and with a soft voice trained, too, to encourage the sale of the more expensive creams and lotions.

“Your skin,” said Miss Carolyn, “is looking a whole lot better. By the time you’ve used about one more jar of that Rose Leaf Cerate . . . you use it every night the way I told you?”

“Oh, yes,” I said.

“Well, it’s helping you. And I’m smoothing out the lines around your mouth. You’ve no idea . . .”

I had no idea. But it was nice, lying back in that comfortable treatment chair in that luxurious cubicle.

“There’s been a lot happening here,” said Miss Carolyn. “We lost a good customer—and I’ve got a plot for you—about a mink coat.”

“Now look,” I said, rather mumbling my words so as not to get a mouthful of fingers and cream, “don’t tell me that old plot about the woman who gets a mink coat from her lover and doesn’t want her husband to find out about it, so she pawns it and gives him the pawn ticket, and he brings her home an old rat fur and she goes to his office and finds his secretary has the new mink coat.”

“Oh, no!” said Miss Carolyn. “It’s nothing like that. What happened here about the beautiful mink coat and how we lost a customer is entirely different. But what you told me—that’s a good story, too.” Punctuating her conversation with new soothing daubs of creams and astringents, Miss Carolyn went on with her story.

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This started months ago. About six months ago, I guess.

The first thing I knew this Miss Everts came here for treatment. Miss Evelyn Everts. A pretty name! She was kind of a tall girl and had a lot of brown hair which she wore combed high. She wore a little too much make-up when she first came here, but she got that toned down before long.

She wasn't young, exactly. But not old, either. In her early thirties, I should say—and sure she could pass for 25. That type. But we don't get many young girls here, except on the First Floor, where they pick up the new lipsticks, or in the Shop, where they buy little funny things to wear in their hair. Or maybe on the Fifth, where they go to take lessons in make-up for the street and for the theater and TV. They're always piling in early in summer to get leg lotion and to learn what to do about sunburn and what lipstick to use when their skin gets tanned. But young girls, really young ones, unless they're in show business, don't bother too much about beauty salons. So Miss Everts was as young as we get them, regularly.

I didn't take care of her much of the time. When a new patron comes in, who doesn't look as if she had too much money, she gets one of the new girls. So she got Miss Phyllis, who gives a very good massage—I let her massage me when she has the time.

Well, this Miss Everts didn't even look as if she could afford the treatments, but there she was, paying for a course of eight treatments in advance, and starting a new course as soon as the last one was over. Private treatments—she didn't want a class. She didn't have the whole thing, just body and face massage. But she didn't need it a lot; she was just a little tired looking, but I guess she wanted to look her best.

And she certainly did start to improve. This isn't a plug for Emily Deane—don't get me wrong! The treatments were just a drop in the bucket. It was just every-

thing about her. When she first started, her clothes were cheap and not in too good taste. Sort of flashy. But each time she came she wore something a little better. At the end of a couple of months she was wearing sleek little black Hattie Carnegie models, or Bergdorf Goodman tailor-mades and John Frederic and Sally Victor hats. And she changed, gradually, from big junk jewelry to pretty good costume jewelry and then to the real thing—Cartier or Tiffany. You can spot them in a minute. We couldn't help noticing and talking about her. It was pretty obvious. She was quite a girl, after a while. She carried herself better. More assurance. And got a sort of a smug smile on her face.

We didn't like her. I don't know why, exactly. She tipped just right. Not too little and not too much. At first she asked a lot of questions, but always about how to look better. And after a while, when I guess she thought there wasn't anything we could teach her, she got pretty high-hat and upstage on us. The elegant society lady dropping in from the Social Register for a bit of going over. But you could tell she was a phony, even if you hadn't watched her change. Some of the most wonderful ladies I know wear shabby, five-year-old suits, and just come in for the smallest jar of cream. One of my old customers, who is a real lady if I ever saw one, can't afford the cheapest treatment, and whenever she comes in for a bottle of astringent or even a lipstick, I tell her I got to demonstrate a new cream or something like that and give her the works. It makes her feel good. You can spot a lady in a minute—there are a dozen signs.

This Evelyn Everts didn't have one of them. She was snippy to the girls, who couldn't answer back. And she was sort of cross. And kind of hinted that she wasn't getting her money's worth. And always dropping a line on where she'd been the night before: the opening of a show, or

the Stork Club, maybe. We don't get around so much, but we all get to nice places, too. And our customers—say—they about populate the smart places, so hearing Miss Everts pipe up with her second-rate brags didn't help a whole lot.

We figured out, right from the start, that some man was paying for all this. That wasn't exactly hard to do. She'd started without much and here she was with, as she must have eyed it, the works. Good clothes, jewelry, massage, the best night places. She had a new apartment, too. We had to hear about that. Small, but done by an interior decorator. Can't you just see it?

And, obviously, the man wasn't a fiancé, or she wouldn't have got the apartment before marriage; she'd have waited, and gone to housekeeping with him. And she'd have told us about him, and sported an engagement ring. She was that kind. And she wasn't married. You can tell that in a minute. And she wasn't a young executive who was making good. You can spot them, too. They ask questions, intelligent questions, and they're grateful for what you do for them, and very considerate and smart.

Miss Everts had caught a man, and she was making the best of it. We felt pretty sorry for him. You could just imagine the line she was pulling—being so elegant and seductive and sort of superior. Making him think he'd won a prize. Not that it was anything to us. We don't care how our patrons get their money, just so they have it. But it was interesting to watch her. Being so smart aleck because she'd caught a man. We figured he must be pretty good, at that. Generous. And sort of easy—to put up with her and not see through her at all. And not too bright—for she certainly couldn't have got anyone who was too clever. And not too young—they act different when they've hooked a young man. Married, undoubtedly—or she'd have got him to marry her. Maybe she had that in mind. She was always sort of hinting at what was in store for her, preparing a

grand future for herself. She got sleeker and smoother and harder by the minute. And all we did was to give her what she paid for, and sort of throw up our hands and say "That one!" as she went out.

I'm glad all of our customers aren't like that, I can tell you. They wear you out. Selfish. Gimme girls. Mrs. Howard was as different from her as day from night.

I didn't see Mrs. Howard when she first came in, but I guess she didn't change so much the first few weeks. Miss Dora had her. Then Miss Dora went to Chicago, and I gave her a massage and after that she asked for me. She was sort of shy, then, and almost embarrassed. She wasn't used to beauty salons and said so, and telling the truth about things like that never did anyone any harm. We can always spot them, anyhow.

Mrs. Howard was about 45, and she looked every day of it. Her hair was sort of mixed gray and her figure was dumpy. Not fat, just pudgy. And her clothes were too awful to describe. Matronly—that's the only word I can think of. The sort of thing the saleswoman wishes on you in a good neighborhood shop. Expensive enough, but no taste or distinction; though, with her figure, nothing would have looked too well on her. Her skin was rough and sort of dead-looking. And her lipstick was entirely the wrong color, and she kind of smeared it on.

When a woman like that hits a spot like Emily Deane's there are only a few reasons. A younger man has fallen for her, which is unlikely, unless she's a rich widow. Or somebody's left her a fortune, and that's unlikely, too, unless she tells about it; folks always want to tell about a fortune. Or her husband has fallen in love with another woman and she wants to get him back—the routine reason. Or her children think she's dowdy and put the pressure on her.

It wasn't a fortune with Mrs. Howard. We gathered that from the way she talked. She'd always had money, even if she hadn't exactly known what to do with it. Her one son was married and living in California, so it wasn't the pressure of the children. And she wasn't falling for a younger man, because she wasn't silly and ridiculous; you can spot that type. So—come to your own conclusion. We did—and with no help in the beginning from Mrs. Howard.

She didn't come in just for an occasional treatment. No, indeed! She asked for the works, and that was what she got. I don't see how a woman of her age could take it, but she did. She got massaged and pummeled. She took the passive reduction treatment and lay there patiently, while we gave it to her. She had lamps and roller treatment, and cabinet baths, and special baths, and exercises. Those exercises are no fun—bending and rolling. The pad you roll on is silk-covered, but it's hard work, I can tell you. Mrs. Howard came in practically every day, and she certainly was a good sport about it. She ate rabbit food, and didn't cheat by putting away French pastry on the sly, the way a lot of women do. She was always patient and good-natured and sort of apologetic for putting us to all that trouble. It was what we were paid for, wasn't it?

She was fairly generous with tips, too. And awfully nice about it, as if she appreciated what we were doing for her and sorry because she didn't metamorphose into a beauty.

At that, she got along pretty well. At the end of six weeks, in a bathing suit and standing on tiptoes, she didn't look like a girl of 16, but she certainly looked a lot better. Her face looked more alive and her skin was smooth and soft. Anyone who gets all of that massage and exercise and diet is bound to improve. Her muscles began to harden up and the fat began to disappear and she held herself better. She had her hair cut and had a good

permanent and had the gray hair touched up. We got our best make-up man to teach her to make up, though she never did it quite like an expert and giggled over it like a girl. But in the end her eyebrows were no longer invisible and she used a little rouge and didn't put it on in the middle of her face like a patch, either, and she learned to use a brush to put on her lipstick and got her mouth into a very nice shape. She didn't look young, exactly. We couldn't do miracles. But she looked years younger and sort of alert and fit. Modern.

We found she did all sorts of charities, though she didn't talk about them. But she was always giving the girls tickets to benefit theatrical performances, and her name was on the patroness list. Things like that.

"You know who her husband is, don't you?" Miss Blanche said. We didn't know. Well, he was with a big engineering firm; important, too, though not famous, exactly. Miss Blanche knew the name, because the name was on a list at a show she took her cousin to, and her cousin was an engineer. The Howards were very well-to-do. Not millionaires, exactly, but a good family and they always had money. Not society at all. Just "backbone of the nation" stock. We knew the Howards had money, the way Mrs. Howard spent it on treatments. And we were awfully glad she was getting something for her money.

She began to dress better, too. Not the way Miss Everts had changed, from cheap things to high style. But clothes that were better in material and line. She obviously was going to good shops instead of patronizing a little neighborhood place. She still was conservative, but her clothes were correct and in good taste. Pretty smart-looking, in a sort of right, middle-aged way. And not trying to be young, either. She still wore her old coat, a Persian lamb that had seen better days, but even with that on she no longer looked out of place when she came into Emily

Deane's. We all felt pretty proud—sort of as if we'd manufactured her.

Proud of her—and worried, too. She would smile at us, very friendly and all that, but when she didn't think we were watching her she looked sad. As if she was worried about something.

I was the one who found out what the trouble was. And I wasn't even fishing for information. I was giving her a treatment. And she said, "Miss Carolyn, is there anything else I can do—to look better, I mean?"

I told her I thought she had just about gone the limit.

"Just keep on using your creams," I told her—we're supposed to sell as much cosmetics as possible, and of course those she uses, for an older skin, are the most expensive.

"Oh, I do," she said. "Just the way you tell me. But there must be something else!"

There wasn't anything else. She was thinner and straighter. And her skin looked fresh. And she sure was younger-looking. But her face sort of puckered up and I thought she was going to cry. And then she closed her eyes and her face got smooth again.

"I—I may as well tell you," she said. "It's my husband. He's—he's interested in—in a younger woman. I don't know that I blame him. He's worked hard all of his life. He—he deserves a little recreation. But until about a year ago he was so devoted. I—I love him a great deal."

She said it very simply, and my heart got sort of all jumpy. I wanted to help her but I didn't know what to say.

"I guess I did sort of let myself go," she went on. "But you see, he had, too. We'd just sort of begun to get old together. Neither one of us thought of anyone else. That is, I never did and I don't think he did. He was home every night; we never even had a vacation apart from

each other. We liked the same people and did the same things. Not very exciting things, but they were enough for me, and I took it for granted they were enough for him.

"But they weren't, you see. He met this girl..."

"I see," I said. I didn't know what else to say.

"He hasn't asked for a divorce," Mrs. Howard said. "That's the best part of it. But I'm afraid he will, any minute. I won't offer him one, but if he asks, I'll have to let him go.

"When I first found out, I didn't know what to do. I don't now, really. But I did all of the things I'd heard about women doing to get their husbands back. I—I tried to develop myself mentally, though I really hadn't let myself go in that way. I read books and go to lectures.

"The trouble is, my husband didn't read books or go to lectures. I think it bored him when I mentioned them. In fact, it bored him more and more—no matter what I said. I've never bothered him with household details. We gave up our house in town a few years ago, when our son married, and went into an apartment and we didn't go to the country this year because he didn't want to. I know now why he wanted to stay in town. He used to play golf and he doesn't care for that any more. He doesn't like any of the things he used to like. Our old friends bore him, and my charities, too. He stays away from home three or four nights a week and doesn't give me a word of explanation."

"Doesn't he think you look well?" I asked. "Didn't your improving your looks help at all?"

I could see tears in her eyes, and not from the cream.

"That's just it," she said. "He doesn't look at me! As far as he is concerned I'm invisible. And if a woman is invisible it doesn't matter if she has lost a few pounds or has had a permanent or a new dress."

"Isn't there something..."

"I've tried everything." Her voice quavered. "He just doesn't see me at all. He listens when I talk, because he has to. He's polite, in, well, an impersonal way. It's as if I just weren't there.

"I guess he'd like it better if I went away. But—I don't want to go away. I don't want to lose him, you see."

I gave her face an extra-hard treatment. I didn't know anything I could tell her. When she tipped me, when she was ready to go, she said, "Please forget what I've told you. I just had to tell someone!"

I told her it was all right, that I was always hearing life histories. And that's true enough. The stories I hear . . .

Well, she went on with her treatments, and looked, mighty well, but still sad-looking, so I knew nothing had happened at home.

And then something did happen. In the Salon.

A couple of us were standing at the desk on the Fifth when Miss Joan rushed up.

"Have I got news!" she said. She was always bristling with bits she'd picked up here and there. The Walter Winchell of Emily Deane's.

"Give out!" I said.

"Well, I found out about Mrs. Ben Howard!"

I sort of bit my lip. Was Mrs. Howard beginning to break, spilling her story all round the place?

"Her husband is in love with Evelyn Everts! How's that for news?"

"What do you mean? How do you know?" we asked.

Miss Joan sort of smiled mysteriously. But after we begged hard enough she told us. It was simple enough. Mrs. Howard had asked just one question:

"Does a young lady named Miss Evelyn Everts come here?"

"Is that all?" I asked. "Maybe she knows her or something."

But I felt it was more than that.

"Is that all? Isn't that enough? We've been wondering about both of them, and never connected the two. It fits together like pieces in a picture puzzle."

"But maybe there's nothing to it..."

"No? Just wait and see."

We waited, and we saw. A week or so later Mrs. Howard asked one of the other girls what hours Miss Everts came to the Salon. And of course we all knew the sixty-four-dollar question in no time at all. News travels faster than by carrier pigeon in a beauty salon. And, if that didn't clinch it, the very next time she was there, on her way out, Mrs. Howard asked the girl at the desk to change her regular time so she could be there when Miss Everts was in the Salon. When that happened we all looked at each other and nodded. And waited for the fireworks.

I don't know what we thought would happen. Someone could have lied and told Mrs. Howard that Miss Everts didn't come to the Salon, though my hunch is that Mrs. Howard knew about Miss Everts's visits, maybe even before she started coming herself. She might even have chosen this place because Miss Everts came here. Mrs. Howard had great patience. Look how she kept up with her course of exercises and diet and treatments. Someone else could have lied about the time of Miss Everts's visits. But no one lied. And there was Mrs. Howard coming at the same time. Miss Everts was there. We held our breaths and waited.

And nothing happened at all!

Miss Everts sailed in, smooth and sleek and superior and hard. A bit more arrogant than ever. Full of the shows she'd seen—especially when it was almost impossible to get tickets—and of the famous people who'd been at

the Stork Club. Well, obviously she didn't know about Mrs. Howard, though I don't believe she'd have cared if she'd thought Mrs. Howard got there at nine o'clock and stayed until closing time just for a glimpse of her.

And Mrs. Howard came in and worked hard at her exercises and took the baths and the treatments. And that's all. Oh, she did one thing more! She asked Miss Phyllis to point out Miss Everts to her. And Miss Phyllis pointed!

And there you are! Nothing happening—and all of us practically breathless.

The only indication that anything was going on was something Mrs. Howard said to me. I was giving her a massage.

"Do you think my hair would look well with an up-swept coiffure?" she asked.

And that was the way Miss Everts wore her hair! I wanted to explain that the worst thing a woman can do is to copy the Other Woman, especially if the Other Woman is years younger, though this time it wouldn't have mattered, anyhow. Hadn't she already told me that, to her husband, she was practically invisible?

"Your hair looks fine the way you wear it," I said. "An upsweep is for, well, younger women. It can be quite aging. You look best the way our stylist arranges your hair, short and softly waved."

She sighed.

"I just don't know what to do," she said. "You don't know what it is, sitting home, night after night, alone. Or going to bed, and lying there not able to sleep, knowing that your husband is with someone else. If—if I didn't care so much about him . . . he's my whole life, you see! I—I don't know what to do!"

I felt pretty sorry for her. But there it was! It had happened before. It will keep on happening. I sighed,

partly in sympathy and partly for relief. She wasn't going to do anything, then! But of course a sweet, gentle little woman like Mrs. Howard wouldn't do anything!

The others breathed easily, too. Some with relief, and some in disappointment. We couldn't stand Miss Everts. And we all liked Mrs. Howard. But what could we do about it? What could anyone do about it? You see, we didn't know Mrs. Howard.

Miss Everts would sail in for her treatments. And Mrs. Howard would be there. And, sometimes, when Miss Everts went from her treatment room to take her special bath, Mrs. Howard, who timed things pretty well, would be where she could take a peek at her. One time, when Miss Everts was taking her bath, Mrs. Howard walked right over and looked in her dressing room. And no one stopped her.

And still nothing happened. And we decided nothing would. And we were all disappointed, even if we didn't say anything.

Then Miss Everts got her mink coat. I told you there was a mink coat in the story. It was a beautiful coat, soft and supple and full, that ranch mink shade that looks better than sable, with great big push-up sleeves and a wonderful ripple back. It certainly was beautiful, that coat. It was so lovely that Miss Everts didn't have to brag about it. Just sailing in, wearing that coat, was bragging enough.

She hadn't worn it in more than a couple of times when Mrs. Howard saw the mink coat. I guess she couldn't help but compare it to her worn Persian lamb, with its fitted, old-fashioned cut. Mr. Howard obviously wasn't being too generous with her, these days, even if he did support her and she had enough money for salon treatments.

An odd look came into Mrs. Howard's eyes when she

saw the coat. That was all. Her expression didn't even change. I watched.

But a funny thing happened. Not that day, but the next time Miss Everts and Mrs. Howard came in for treatments, Mrs. Howard kept her eyes on her wrist watch. And in the middle of her massage she got up and went to the door of her treatment room, and stood there. Soon Miss Everts left her treatment room. And Mrs. Howard, her face full of cream and with the pale pink treatment sheet around her, went into Miss Everts's room. I watched her.

She took the mink coat down from its hanger, and held it in her hands. I didn't know what she was going to do. Surely she wasn't going to destroy that beautiful mink coat.

She didn't do anything at all! That is, she hung up the coat again, came back, lay down in the treatment chair—and I finished her massage. She didn't say anything at all, but there was a curious expression on her face. I'd have looked a whole lot different if I had a husband and he'd done a thing like that...

No one else had seen that incident and I didn't tell anyone about Mrs. Howard examining Miss Everts's mink coat. I'm not Miss Joan or Walter Winchell, either. If it gave Mrs. Howard any satisfaction to hold the coat her husband had bought for another woman...

The next time Mrs. Howard came in for her treatment she looked even more peculiar, sort of nervous. Her facial was the last part of her treatment, and I'd hardly got a good start when she stopped me.

"If you'll wipe off my face," she said. "I just remembered an engagement..."

That was an odd thing to say. No woman remembers an engagement in the middle of a beauty treatment. And Mrs. Howard was so patient and steady and dependable. But of course I wiped the cream off and patted on the

astringent. She barely waited for it to dry. She jumped out of the chair and put on her make-up. And in spite of her hurry, she sure did a good job. She'd learned. It was automatic now. Pretty nearly.

She put on her dress and hat, then took down the Persian lamb coat and held it on her arm, and stood at the door of her treatment room. And waited. Quietly. Patiently.

Pretty soon Miss Everts and her masseuse—it was Miss Hazel that day—went out of her treatment room to Miss Everts's special bath.

Mrs. Howard stood there just a minute. And then, very quietly and with great dignity, she went into Miss Everts's treatment room. There were three people standing at the desk in the middle of the central room from which the little treatment rooms open. They watched Mrs. Howard. But no one said anything. Or did anything.

Mrs. Howard stood very still in Miss Everts's room. And then she put back her head. And there was a curious expression on her face. Almost a smile.

And she took Miss Everts's lovely mink coat down from the hanger. And she put it on! She slipped her old Persian lamb coat on the hanger. And she left the treatment room.

Wearing the mink coat—and wearing it quite as if it belonged to her—she came up to us, standing there by the desk.

"Don't worry!" she said. "You won't get into trouble over this. It's all right. Tell Miss—Miss Everts that I took the mink coat."

We stood there with our mouths open, not saying a word. And Mrs. Howard took the elevator and went down to the Main Floor and out of Emily Deane's, wearing the mink coat.

We were practically beside ourselves waiting for Miss Everts to get back. In spite of Mrs. Howard's words we

were worried. Would we get arrested for allowing a woman to escape with stolen property? What would happen?

Miss Everts sailed into her treatment room. A minute later she let out a yell. And then she stormed out to us. There were six of us, now, and we tried to look innocent.

"My mink coat! It's been stolen!" she shrieked. "Someone took it and left this lousy old thing..." She held the Persian lamb coat at arm's length.

Miss Joan spoke up. She certainly has courage, that one. Or maybe she likes a scene. Her voice was low, almost caressing. As if she were recommending the most expensive cream in the whole Emily Deane line.

"Why," she said. "Mrs. Howard—Mrs. Ben Howard, you know—came in just now and picked it up. She said to tell you..."

I didn't know there were so many four-, five-, and seven-letter words in any vocabulary. Miss Everts's education had far exceeded Mr. Webster's amateur efforts. The things she said! We had to smile after a few minutes of listening to her.

Finally she stomped back to her treatment room, got into her clothes. She put on the Persian lamb coat. It was pretty cold outdoors. And she stomped over to the elevators. Well, anyhow, she didn't say anything about having us arrested.

Miss Everts never did come back to Emily Deane's, though there were still two treatments that she'd paid for in her last course and hadn't used. I told you we lost a customer.

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"What about Mrs. Howard?" I wanted to know. Miss

Carolyn had stopped my massage and was wiping the cream from my face.

"I'm coming to that," she said.

"We were all pretty worried about Mrs. Howard. For three weeks we didn't see her at all. We thought we'd lost another customer and we were dying to know what had happened. And then, when we'd just about decided we'd never know about it, she sailed in, pretty as you please.

"I mean she looked better than I'd ever seen her, in spite of the fact she hadn't had a treatment in all that time. And she's at the age where she ought to keep them up." Miss Carolyn gave me a telling look; I'm apt to neglect my treatments.

"What did she say?" I asked.

"Well, she didn't say much at first. Sort of shy. She's that type. Didn't talk until I had the massage well under way. What we didn't know was that she'd looked at the coat that first time especially to see the label. Then she'd telephoned the furrier and said she was speaking for Mr. Howard—to find out if her husband really had bought the mink coat. She didn't want to get arrested as a thief, you see. Well, Mr. Howard had bought the fur coat, all right. She knew that when she took it."

"But what happened?"

"Well, she knew her husband was coming home to dinner that night. So she waited until she was sure he'd be at home. And came in, wearing the mink coat. And she told him what she had done. Imagine! He never even knew she knew Miss Everts's name! I don't know how she found that out in the first place, but it's easy enough if you put your mind to it."

"What did he say?"

"Well, Mrs. Howard said that, at first, he was mad as

blazes. She'd rather expected that. And she'd been afraid that maybe he'd throw her out.

"And then, suddenly, he began to laugh. He laughed and laughed, Mrs. Howard said. More than he'd laughed—in front of her—for a long time. I guess he thought it was pretty smart of her. And it showed him how much she cared, too. And for the first time in months he actually looked at her. And she was looking pretty good. He never knew she had that much spunk. And for the first time in ages they had something to talk about. He admired her, I guess.

"He was going South on a business trip. So he took her along. As soon as she got back she came in for a treatment—didn't want to neglect herself, now that she had her husband back. And that beautiful mink coat and all..."

"That's a wonderful story, Miss Carolyn," I said.

"Oh, it's all right. That story you told me about a mink coat is all right, too. I guess nearly every mink coat has got a story tied up in it. Mink seems to be that kind of fur."

She touched my cheek. The astringent was dry.

"If you don't use Rose Leaf Cerate every night," she said, "I really can't promise..."

"All right, get me another jar," I said.

MRS. WILSON'S HUSBAND GOES FOR A SWIM

ON THE FIVE-FIFTEEN going from New York to Willow Dell, Edgar Wilson looked—and was, for that matter—the average commuter. One glance at him—no one gave him more—and you knew he caught the 8:20 in the morning, worked hard all day, probably at a desk job, and hurried to the comfortable security of his home at the very same time every night.

If you had pursued your thought of him, which is unlikely, you probably would have decided that he bought a new and inexpensive car every two years, took care of his own furnace in winter and ~~his~~ own garden in summer, listened to the radio, watched television or usually fell asleep over a book or magazine or the newspaper in the evening, had various local social activities, mostly during week ends, and very occasionally went into town for a big night. You might have guessed that he had a couple of children, for whom he did the best he could and whom he adored.

You'd have been wrong only on the last count. Edgar Wilson was childless. And, of course, by looking at him, you couldn't have known about Minnie. You couldn't have guessed about her.

Edgar Wilson was quite a nice-looking man, in an

unobtrusive sort of way. His hair was beginning to recede and had already gone into peaks on his forehead. He didn't carry his shoulders too straight. His heart had been too weak for active military service; but he felt ill effects from it only when he tried to run upstairs. When he was nervous, he bit his fingers.

Now, as all the others were doing on the evening train, he read his paper and glanced occasionally out the window. There were faint signs of spring. Trees showed pale pin-pricks of green along their branches. The air was still cool. Edgar was wearing a topcoat and needed it; but, before long, it would be warm enough to work in the garden and go for a swim at one of the public beaches. Swimming was his greatest pleasure. By closing his eyes, now, he could almost feel the freedom that the ocean brought him: the long expanse of sand, even when it was thickly dotted with other humans; the great waves of the sea, darkly green with feathers of white; and the beautiful, far-off horizon.

Before the train reached Willow Dell, Edgar had tucked his newspaper into his coat pocket and was waiting for the train to stop at his station. He got out, nodded to a couple of other commuters, turned toward Pelton Street.

As he walked, a change came over him. Unless you had known him well, you wouldn't have noticed it. Edgar himself was not aware that anything happened to him. His shoulders slumped a little more. His step, quite confident as he left the train, became unsure. He was quite nervous as he went up the steps of 22 Pelton Street, his home.

Certainly the house was nothing to be afraid of. It was a cheerful enough dwelling, the middle one of three just alike. Yellow stucco, with an open, grinning porch. Edgar's own choice would have been a little white cottage, farther out in the country; but this was Minnie's selection. "I

certainly don't want to be on the edge of nowhere, without any neighbors around," she had said.

Edgar put his key in the door. As he entered the hall, he heard Minnie's voice.

"That you, Ed?" Minnie always asked that. And always just that way.

"Yes, it's me," he said, ungrammatically, as he always did.

Minnie was busy at the stove, as Edgar knew she would be. No matter how sketchy her dinners, she was always at the stove when he came home.

"How are you, Minnie?" Edgar asked, trying to make his voice sound friendly.

"I'm all right. How do you expect me to be? Hanging around here all day."

"You didn't go out?"

"Where was there to go? Every time I go into town and try to buy a few things for the house, you complain about the money I spend."

"Why, I don't, Minnie. I just thought we didn't need new lamps."

"I know. I go into town and buy a couple of lamps for the living room. And you talk and talk. And here you are—complaining about them again."

"I'm not complaining, Minnie. I just thought—"

"You're always 'just thinking.' Why, you've already taken all the pleasure out of the lamps, as far as I'm concerned. Other women get things for their houses, I notice."

"Maybe other men make more money."

"Of course they do! That's just it! That's one of the things I mean. Other men aren't afraid to ask for a raise!"

"But I told you, Minnie, this isn't the time—"

"It's never the time. Last year it was one thing. Now it's something else. Other men have the courage to ask for a raise, and get it, too. The way I keep after you,

trying to make you ambitious! Ever since we were married I've kept after you; but it doesn't do a bit of good. I've asked you again and again to bring your boss out here and let me talk to him. But, no, I'm not good enough to meet your boss."

"It isn't that, Minnie. It really isn't. But I know how he feels."

"Little you know about men. 'f I could talk to him—"

Edgar shuddered. Hawkins, his boss, was really a very fine fellow. But difficult. Neurotic. Spoke in a slow, hesitant voice. Liked to talk for hours about his symptoms. Could eat only certain things. Had all sorts of allergies. Just the kind of person Minnie couldn't—and wouldn't—understand. One conversation with Minnie, and Edgar felt he wouldn't have a job at all. His boss respected him, paid him all he was worth. Why not let well enough alone?

Edgar went upstairs. Took off his coat. Looked out the window. Yes, it was spring. Before long he'd go to the ocean—all day on Sundays.

Minnie's voice, too high, whining, broke into his thoughts. "Why don't you come down? You were late. Dinner's all ready."

He hadn't been late. But there was no use arguing with Minnie. "I'm coming," he said.

The dinner, like all of Minnie's meals, was sketchy. Edgar ate without complaint. For a while there was silence. Then Minnie started in with her day's activities. The butcher had been rude again.

"Why don't you change butchers?" Edgar asked. It seemed a simple solution.

"You would say that!" Minnie's voice was shrill. "I walk clear to the end of Dunham Road, to save money. All the butchers in Willow Dell charge more than city prices, and

you know it. I guess you'd like steak every night. But when it comes to paying for it!"

"But there must be some around here. What do other women—"

"Other women! Other women! I try to save money by going to a cheap butcher who insults me, and all I hear about is other women. Sure, I'd like filets and sweetbreads from the best places, too. Just ring up and charge! But who's to pay the bills, I'd like to know? Not you! Not on the amount I get to run the house!"

"You get all I make, Minnie. You know that. Why, the bank account is in your name as much as mine. You know that every cent—"

"Every cent! Cent is right! It takes all my planning and scraping to keep that cent in the bank! Do you think I like cheap chopped meat?"

Edgar didn't answer.

"Do you think I do?" Minnie pursued. "Do you think I like staying out here all day while you're in town? Do you think I like—" Her complaining voice went on and on.

Edgar knew better than to try to stem the tide. He used to try. Once he used to ask Minnie what she did all day—for, when he came home after a day in the city, the house hadn't been dusted or the bed made. Always she was evasive. Always there was a tirade. He gathered that she read the tabloids, listened to the radio, watched television, or just wasted time doing nothing. Once he asked her why she didn't join the Red Cross or other local organizations. There were always reasons why she couldn't.

For dessert there was lemon pie. Purchased, of course, at the local pastry shop. If Minnie ever had known how to bake, she had never given Edgar a sample of her ability.

"Good pie!" said Edgar. He liked coffee with his dessert, but never got it. Minnie felt that drinking coffee at night

kept her from sleeping. So she never made coffee for dinner.

As always, Edgar helped Minnie clear the table. Dried the dishes as she washed them. It never occurred to him that he'd done his day's work, that he had earned freedom from this task. He really didn't mind the dishes.

When the kitchen was in order, he went into the living room, stretched out in the big chair, began to read.

Minnie fiddled with the television.

"Oh, it's Thursday," said Edgar. "I think there's a speech on at nine." He looked for the program in his newspaper.

"I won't listen to a speech," said Minnie, "and I won't listen to a news commentator. We ought to have some music some of the time in this house. Something pleasant ought to happen once in a while."

Edgar didn't answer.

Minnie fiddled some more, found an orchestra. "Unless you'd rather go to the movies," she said.

"I thought there wasn't anything you wanted to see."

"Well, there isn't, really. Tomorrow night—"

"We'll go then."

"Aren't you the dandy! Of course we'll go then. I've already asked the Frederickses in later, for drinks. I've got to have some kind of life."

Edgar couldn't stand the Frederickses. Joe Fredericks had a loud, unpleasant voice, and he got foolish after two drinks, and Mrs. Fredericks was a silly little nitwit. But Minnie liked them. They were one of the few couples she got along with. Poor Minnie! Maybe she didn't have much of a life.

His head ached. The TV blared.

"Turn down that TV," he said. Perhaps, without meaning it, his voice was loud, above the music.

"Don't yell at me!" shrieked Minnie. "I stay out here

in this hole of a suburb all day and see no one and expect a little companionship. I have dinner all ready for you, and you fuss at me all during dinner. Then you close up like a clam, as soon as dinner is over, and now you yell because I want a little music. I've got to have some kind of life!"

"I didn't mean to yell. But it hurts my ears. I've got a headache, Minnie."

Minnie turned from one station to another, producing a series of squeaks and blares and voices. Finally she settled down to a murder mystery. Edgar tried to read.

Minnie's voice brought him to himself with a start. "There you go," she said. "Sleeping with your mouth open, and the evening just starting."

"Sorry," said Edgar and shook himself. He lit a cigarette and tried to read again.

"Nothing ever happens," Minnie began again. "This isn't any life!"

"Please don't get started on that, dear."

"What shall I get started on then? It's my life. All the life I've got."

Edgar could have reminded her that she was the one who hadn't liked living in a city apartment, that she had insisted on moving to the suburbs, so that she'd get in with people. But this didn't seem the time to tell her about it.

"Pretty soon," said Edgar, "the weather will be warm enough to go to the beach."

"The beach, the beach—it's all you care about."

"I thought you liked it, honey."

"Once in a while, yes. But I have to do all the work, fix the lunch—"

"We can buy lunch just as well, if you're satisfied with hot dogs and things like that."

"But all we do is sit, and you go in the water a few

times. I get so hot and tired when we go to the beach."

"It's something to do," said Edgar. He didn't dare say how much it meant to him—the feeling of being easy and free and looking far out, into something greater than he had words for.

Minnie fiddled with the television, turned it off finally. "Might as well go to bed," she said.

They turned out the lights, went upstairs. There wasn't a dog to put out. They'd had a nice dog, a cocker; but he'd been run over. Minnie said she'd never have another dog—too much trouble and hair all over the furniture. Minnie didn't want children, either. When they'd first married, she was afraid. And then there wasn't money enough, she said. Oh, well!

They occupied a double bed. Minnie didn't believe in twin beds. "Too many couples get separated that way," she said. But never explained just what she meant. Edgar was always afraid to turn over, for fear he'd wake her. Luckily Minnie slept soundly, though she never admitted it. Funny, thought Edgar, how people are ashamed to say they sleep well.

Minnie was fussing at little things as she got ready for bed. Edgar, who had got into bed quickly, looked at her. She certainly didn't look anything like the magazine pictures of women about to get into bed. Poor Minnie! She really didn't have much. Married to him, and not getting along very well with people, and all.

"Coming to bed soon, dear?" he asked, as gently as he could.

"Yes, I'm coming to bed." Her voice was crosser than usual. "Sleep and eat! With me doing the cooking and making the bed. It's all there is to do."

"Minnie," said Edgar, and he tried to keep his voice calm, "if you're really unhappy, maybe we ought to sep-

arate. I've told you that. I do what I can; but if we can't get along—"

"There you go again. Trying to get away."

"Not at all," said Edgar, "only if you—"

"Well, you won't get away. I promise you that. I'll never give you cause for a divorce—not here or anyplace else. If you left me, I'd see that you paid through the nose, or you'd end in alimony jail. There are jails for men who don't pay alimony, you know."

"Minnie, I'm not talking about a divorce."

"You'd better not! And if you run around with anyone—"

"I'm home every night, as you know. I thought that was what you were complaining about. I never look at another woman. I couldn't spend a cent on her if I did. You know where every cent I have goes. Right into the bank the day I get it. What more—"

"Then stop all this talk about separation. I've seen too many women alone—nobody wanting them around."

"But you're not satisfied. And you're always saying you could get someone else."

"I guess I could," said Minnie complacently. "What you've done once you can do again." She laughed, her unhumorous laugh with no fun in it. "You're no bargain I guess; but I married you. I guess I'll make the best of it. I'm stuck with you."

That was settled. Edgar knew there was no use bringing it up again. Though, at that, he had never thought definitely of a separation or a divorce. He knew Minnie wouldn't let him go. He didn't seem to have enough energy or will for freedom to do anything about getting away. All he wanted was peace. A little happiness. Goodness, he worked hard. As hard as he could. The trips to the city. Hours in the office. Cheap lunches in little lunchrooms. All he wanted was peace and quiet. And when summer came, the beach.

Minnie turned out the light. Got into bed. Edgar felt her pulling the covers comfortably around her. Timidly he put out a hand, patted her shoulder. Maybe, after this, she'd feel a little affectionate.

He sighed just a little. "Good night, Minnie," he said. And said his prayers. And lay there a long time, trembling in the darkness. His eyes filled with tears, and he was ashamed of his weakness. He knew how Minnie felt about wanting more to life than this. He wanted more. So much more. What could he do about it? He tried all the time. Well, when summer came. . . . Finally he fell asleep.

Edgar awoke as usual. As usual he bathed and shaved and hurried down to breakfast.

"I think I'll go into town and look at rugs," Minnie said.

Edgar gulped his coffee, didn't want to start a quarrel.

"I know we can't afford a new rug," Minnie went on.

"You know our finances as well as I do."

"You bet I do! But the living room looks awful. I'm ashamed—humiliated—when anyone comes in. That old rug we brought from the apartment. Everyone else has broadloom, all one color. Is it asking too much to want a home you're not ashamed of?"

Edgar knew better than to remind Minnie she had worked before she was married—worked and hated it. That she undoubtedly could get a job and buy the furnishings she wanted. He'd gone through all that too many times. He wiped his mouth on the paper napkin. He put on his topcoat, took his hat.

"Good-bye, Minnie! Have a nice day," he said.

He waited on the Willow Dell platform for the 8:20, spoke to the other commuters, as usual. Wasn't this a usual day?

He bought a paper and read it all the way to town.

Then he caught a subway to his office, the way he did every morning. In his office building he hurried to the elevator, nodded to the elevator man, said "Twelve," though surely the man ought to know by this time where he worked.

He glanced around casually, in the elevator, as he always did. And it wasn't until a long time later that he knew that this morning was different from the hundreds of mornings that preceded it.

There was a girl in the elevator. As far as he knew, he'd never seen her before. She wasn't a child, exactly—maybe in her middle twenties. She had a fine, serious face and nice eyes. And brown hair, almost straight, but just curled up a little at the ends. Just the kind of girl that was in this kind of elevator every day. No more worthy of notice than he was worthy of notice. She was not very tall, and she was very slender. And her coat was dark cloth. Just a girl on her way to her job. For some reason their eyes met. And Edgar smiled. And the girl smiled, too!

"Nice day," Edgar nodded.

"Yes, it is," the girl said.

It was a nice day!

Not that Edgar thought about her again that day. It was just that things seemed brighter somehow. Maybe because spring was in the air and the sea was that much nearer.

There were a dozen orders on his desk that needed his attention. At lunch he ate a kidney stew that didn't agree with him. Minnie was cross at dinner, because the rugs hadn't been what she wanted—even if she could have afforded them. He was the only one who liked the movie they went to. The Frederickses both got quite drunk afterwards. Then it rained for three days.

He was pulling his hat down on his head, making

ready to sprint for the subway, as he was leaving his office building at the end of the third day of rain, when he noticed a girl having trouble with her umbrella.

"Maybe I can help you," he said. He was pretty handy with little things like umbrellas. He had the umbrella in his hand before he noticed that it belonged to the girl to whom he had spoken in the elevator. He fixed the umbrella easily enough. Opened it. Handed it to her.

"Going my way?" she asked.

"I'm going to the subway."

"So am I."

There they were, walking along in the rain together. Edgar had a nice, warm feeling of belonging to someone. Silly. A girl he'd seen once before. But there they were, the two of them, the umbrella shutting out everyone else in the world. And then they'd reached the subway kiosk.

"I'm going uptown," the girl said.

"I'm going downtown. Just my luck!"

"Thank you!" said the girl, waving the umbrella.

"Thank *you!*" said Edgar.

The warm feeling stayed with him until he got home. Minnie was furious with everything. He couldn't exactly blame her. Three days in Willow Dell in the rain. Of course, it was raining other places, too. But Minnie—

It was a week later, and the sun was shining. And there really was spring in the air. Edgar, on his way to lunch, was standing in the doorway of his building wondering whether to take a walk and then eat, or eat and then walk, or just walk.

The girl came out. She was wearing a black hat with a pink rose on it. A saucy little hat. Indeed it was spring!

They smiled and nodded.

"Going to lunch?" asked Edgar.

"Yes, I am," said the girl. "Isn't it wonderful out?"

"Too nice to be alone" Edgar wondered at his bold-

ness. "Couldn't you—I mean, I'd like it if you'd have lunch with me."

"Love it!" the girl said.

And there they were, walking along in the sunshine! Edgar figured that, if he had a hot dog and coffee, or an apple, the rest of the week, he could afford a nice luncheon today. Minnie knew to a penny how much he spent.

He chose a little restaurant he'd passed a lot and heard about. Sort of solid, with oak walls and very white tablecloths.

The food was good. The girl was friendly. It had been a long time since anyone had treated Edgar like this—nicely, without criticism. They talked about nothing at all. The girl read all the newspapers, it seemed—editorials and everything. The funnies, too! She'd read a lot more books than Edgar had. He mustn't fall asleep so quickly in the evening. She loved the theater, but couldn't afford it very often. She'd been in New York two years, shared a kitchenette apartment with another girl.

Edgar couldn't believe it when he suddenly realized he'd spent longer than his lunch hour.

"We must do this again soon," he said.

"I'd like it a lot," the girl said.

Not until Edgar was in his office did he realize that, since his marriage, he hadn't bought lunch for any woman or been alone with any woman except his wife. What a nice girl his luncheon companion had been! Not once had she criticized him. But, of course, strangers don't criticize, do they? Only his wife could do that. Only her friends could laugh at him, belittle him. Oh, well, he'd probably never see the girl again. Why, he didn't even know her name. Or where she lived. Or what office she worked in. Oh, well, it had been a pleasant adventure.

The feeling of pleasure lasted all day, through the ride home, through Minnie's horrible dinner.

"What's the matter with you?" Minnie asked. "You're sitting there with the sickliest grin on your face."

"Something I read in the paper coming home."

He tried to think of something; but luckily Minnie had lost interest. She'd had a quarrel with a new neighbor and hadn't told him nearly all the details.

The weather grew warmer, and there came a Sunday warm enough for the beach. Minnie insisted on preparing lunch. Edgar thought Minnie might like to go to church with him; but she wouldn't, and he went alone. On his return he stowed the lunch in the back of the car, with the beach parasol and the blanket and the other paraphernalia Minnie thought necessary for such an excursion.

There wasn't too much traffic. Edgar drove in silence. Minnie pointed out things along the way, always in criticism or envy. Edgar didn't pay much attention to that; it was just Minnie's way. He wished she were different; but you can't make a person over, he'd found out.

They found a parking place easily enough, for it was early in the season. Edgar carried most of the things; Minnie wasn't good at carrying bundles. They went to their separate bathhouses, and then, there they were on the beach. Minnie was finicky about finding a place—not near people she took a sudden dislike to and not too near the water—the tide was sure to rise. But finally they were set—at the beach.

Edgar gave a great sigh of pleasure, stretched out on the sand, looked up at the sky. The sand was warm. The sky was blue. A great sense of freedom, of the beauty of the world, came over him. This—this was living!

Minnie's voice crashed into his joy. "I forgot my glasses. This sun will give me a headache in half an hour."

He padded through the sand to the boardwalk, found a shop and dark glasses. It took half an hour. He shook his head. Something had happened to the day. Oh, well, the sea was still there.

Minnie sat there with her glasses on, a huddled and uncomfortable figure. She looked with envy at the slender girls who passed. Minnie's figure had grown heavier each year, and she never did anything about it except envy more graceful women and talk about dieting, but never dieted.

"You don't mind if I go in the water?" asked Edgar. He knew Minnie wouldn't go in this early in the season.

"No, go in," said Minnie, turning so she could watch him. No use letting him think he could get away with any funny business.

"It's a wonder she lets me go to business alone," Edgar thought, and was ashamed of himself for thinking it.

The water was cold. It stabbed his body like a thousand little sharp knives and then suddenly burned. Dark blue water flowing against him, and the sky blue above. And if you disregarded the people around you, you were all alone. You and the sky and the sea. Life became important again. Real. This was worth living for! Worth working for! Worth being with Minnie, listening to Minnie.

He ran back to the sand, to Minnie. Lay, stretched out, and pretended to sleep. The warm sun seeped into him. The sand, moist from his body, clung, caressed.

"I'm getting hungry," said Minnie. She spread out the thick sandwiches, the warm drinks. He ate, for the air had made him hungry. And drank in the beauty of that far horizon.

"Let's go home," said Minnie far too soon. "The air's getting chilly. I know I'll catch cold."

Oh, well, there'd be other days at the beach.

Usually in summer Edgar had a half-holiday on Satur-

day, though he couldn't always plan on it. He didn't get to the beach, though. Minnie saw to that. Once a week ought to be enough. The next Saturday she felt he ought to work in the garden. That wasn't a bad idea, really. He worked in the garden.

On Sunday Minnie had a headache.

"I can't stand another day like last Sunday—just sitting in the sun. Why don't you go alone?"

"You mean you won't mind?"

"I'd rather do something that's fun. You can get back early enough to take me to that new place on Frenough Road for dinner."

"Sure, I'll be back early."

Edgar got away as soon as he could. Alone! At the beach! He hadn't even hoped for it. He got into a bathing suit. Ran into the water. Took a quick swim. Ran back to the sand. Lay there, completely at ease.

If only he could lie like this all of his life, near an ocean someplace. Alone, no one to bother him. No one, unless there was someone he cared for. The ocean and the sunshine. Work, of course, too. You couldn't ask for too much out of life. The gods had to have labor. But working usefully. And someone you cared about. And the ocean. And the warm sand. And the sun.

He went in the water again. The sea was calm. He breathed hard, because his heart wasn't strong; but he swam smoothly. He felt renewed and cleansed.

And, swimming, he had an idea. Why, if he wanted to, he could swim out and out. . . .

He could swim out and never come back. Away from commuting trains. Away from the office. Away from Willow Dell. Away from Minnie! Funny, he'd never thought of that before!

He came out of the water and stopped to talk to one of the lifeguards.

"Lots to do today, eh?" asked Edgar.

"Sure, always on a sunny day. The fools go out too far because the ocean looks harmless. They forgot about the undertow."

"Lots of folks get drowned?"

"Too many."

"You—you get the bodies?"

"Some of 'em. Some you get right away and even bring em to life. Others drift back in a week or ten days. If they're not back then, they're gone forever."

"Really!" said Edgar. "I didn't know that."

"Not many folks do. I been at this job for years. You know something?"

"What?" asked Edgar.

"Three thousand people get lost a year—fifteen thousand in five years. In New York alone!"

"Not all in the water?"

"Oh, no! Altogether. They go away and don't come back. Detective from the Missing Persons Bureau of the Police Department told me."

"Good heavens!" said Edgar.

"Yes, it's quite a number. Some of 'em walk out and never come back. Some get killed. Some get drowned. Some just want to get away from home, I guess."

Edgar mulled it over. Three thousand a year who were never found! "That's a lot of people trying to get away," he said.

"Sure is," said the lifeguard. "Trying to, or getting bumped off or lost."

"Sure is funny," said Edgar.

"Sure is," said the lifeguard.

Edgar thought of it all the way home. You could just

walk into the ocean and be free. Forever. Or you could just disappear. People did.

But how could he disappear? Minnie was suspicious if he took an extra hour away from her. If he just left, she'd get him back. And there he'd be, more enslaved than ever.

It was very warm a few Saturdays later. Edgar's office closed at noon. He telephoned Minnie. "I've got the afternoon off. If you'd like to go to the beach—"

"I should say not. In this heat!"

"You don't care if I go?"

"No, I suppose not."

"I think I'll go right out, then. If you're sure you don't care."

Minnie couldn't think of anything she cared about less.

And then, going down in the elevator, Edgar saw the girl whose umbrella he had fixed, the girl he'd taken to lunch weeks before. They walked out of the building together.

"It's a wonderful day," the girl said.

"Isn't it, though. And I've got the afternoon off."

"I have, too."

"I thought I'd go to the beach."

"It would be wonderful there."

"Do you like the water?"

"Of course. I love it!"

"Would you like to come with me? Just to one of the public beaches?"

"I surely would. And I know a place," said the girl. "I've been there a couple of times this year already." It was the same beach Edgar always went to.

"Sounds good to me; that's my beach, too," said Edgar.

They rode out on the train, and it was a holiday! Everyone around them seemed laughing and happy. They

were laughing and happy, too. Edgar hadn't felt so care-free in years—not since he was a boy.

The girl preferred a different part of the beach—a few hundred yards from where Edgar normally went. The attendant who gave out the bathhouse tickets was a funny little gnome, and he knew the girl.

“Glad to see you, Miss Wyatt,” he said.

When they were on the beach, in rented bathing suits, Edgar looked at her. Why, she was beautiful! Slender—Minnie'd say she was too thin. Make fun of her, more than likely.

Edgar wanted to tell her how fine she looked. He didn't dare presume. He said something else.

“Do you know, I didn't know your name—and the man at the bathhouse—”

The girl laughed. “That's not my name,” she said. “My name's Frances Black. But one day he said, ‘What's your name, Miss?’ and I was so surprised I stuttered, ‘Why—why—it's—’ and he said, ‘Oh, Wyatt!’—and there didn't seem any reason to correct him.”

“No reason in the world,” said Edgar, and laughed, too.

“So I lead a double life,” she said.

“I always thought a double life might be fun.”

“It is fun,” said Frances.

It was a wonderful day! They ran down to the beach. Frances loved the sun and the sand and the sea. They ate hot dogs and ice-cream cones, and Edgar thought they tasted better than any hot dogs or ice-cream cones he had ever had. They went into the water. They lay quietly side by side on the sand.

“I've never been so happy in my life,” Edgar said to himself. He had thought that the sand and the sea were enough. Why, they hadn't been enough at all!

And then the afternoon was over.

"I can't tell you how much I enjoyed it, Miss—"

"You'd better call me 'Frances.' That will take in both of my lives."

"Frances," he said. "My name's Edgar Wilson. Thank you for a beautiful afternoon."

He was back in Willow Dell, and he knew that something important had happened to him. He had to hide a smile when Minnie called him down for being late. Why, he knew a girl who was young and pretty and kind.

Sunday he worked in the garden. Minnie wouldn't go to the beach, and he knew he couldn't go alone so soon again, and he dreamed of a hundred things. But mostly of a girl named Frances. It was the first time he'd had anyone nice to dream about.

Funny about Minnie and him. He'd never loved her, actually. But he'd met her, and she'd been unhappy, working, and had wanted a home—had talked of the home she could make for some man. She'd talked, and he'd listened. Oh, it had been his own fault. He'd been old enough to know better. But he'd been alone in the city. Hadn't he suffered enough for his mistake? Well, now things were different. Besides the beach to think about, there was a girl named Frances.

For three days he waited, most of his lunch hour, at the entrance of the building. She didn't appear. On the fourth day she came out just as he was losing hope.

"This won't do," he said. "I'll have to know where to find you. I don't know the name of the firm you work for."

"Of course," she said. "It never occurred to me." She told him. They went to lunch together.

"I've got something to tell you," said Edgar. "I didn't think there was any need to tell you. But I guess you ought to know. I'm married."

"Oh!" said Frances.

"Not that it makes any difference," Edgar said. "I don't flatter myself that you're interested enough to care whether I'm married or single. Only—"

"I do care," said Frances. "I made up my mind, once, never to make a date with a married man."

"I don't blame you," said Edgar, and suddenly there was a great lump where his heart had been. He shouldn't have told her! Why, if she hadn't known he was married—

"But that was a long time ago. I—I don't have much luck with men, I guess. There was a boy in my home town—"

And she told about the boy who had been all attention until a visitor came to town. He was married to the visiting girl now.

"My father was dead. Then my mother died, and I'm an only child, so there wasn't anything to keep me at home. I'm really all alone."

"You have—" He wanted to say "me." Lamely, he finished, "A lot of friends."

"I'm afraid I haven't. My roommate is getting married next week—moving to Kansas."

"We'll—we'll have a good time together," Edgar said. Why not? Couldn't he have a little happiness?

"I'm so much older than you are," he said, "and I don't amount to a great deal—not important or rich or anything. And married. Maybe you aren't very good at picking friends."

"I think you're swell!" Frances said.

Edgar beamed. It was the first compliment he'd had in a long time.

Two Saturdays later, when he had the afternoon off and Minnie didn't want to go to the beach, he telephoned Frances at her office. Waited anxiously. Yes, Frances would be delighted to go with him.

"It's funny," she said on the way. "You're leading a

double life, too. The little man at the bathhouse asked me last week where Mr. Wyatt was."

They laughed about it. For some reason Edgar thought it was pretty fine. Married, even in the mind of a beach-house man, to Frances. Edgar and Frances Wyatt! Why, that sounded wonderful! But what nonsense! He was married to Minnie. It was Edgar and Minnie Wilson. Oh, well.

The beach was as wonderful as ever. He and Frances ran along the sand, played ball with some boys, took a swim, and lay quietly and close together.

This was all he wanted out of life. Frances and a beach. And work to do. And coming home to Frances.

If he could get away! Away from Minnie. From Willow Dell. Something better than walking out into the sea. Away with Frances!

Three thousand people a year. They didn't all die. They didn't all drown. Or get killed. Some of them got away!

He thought of that from then on. A little nibble in the back of his mind. Always there. He could get away! Away from Minnie's everlasting quarreling and fault-finding. Away from her frigidity. Her ugliness. Get away. Not into the sea. Not to death. But to life!

He could do it! He'd have to do it! He didn't know how; but it would work out.

He got a raise. A substantial one. Any other time he'd have sent the check to the bank, hurried home to Minnie with the news. Now he had another idea.

In a bank far from his office he opened a checking account. Made out to Edgar A. Wyatt. He put the difference in his salary into the new account.

He loved Frances. There was no denying it. His love for her was the greatest thing in his life—his only love. And she loved him! She shouldn't, of course. Her life had been sad. This time, he'd have to see that it

wasn't. Have to give her some happiness. Not that she didn't act gay. She always did. But he wanted a more lasting happiness. Something more than these stolen hours.

He talked it over with Frances. She would do whatever he thought best. He knew that.

Gradually, his plan took form. Little pieces fitting together. In the first place, he wouldn't cheat anyone. Getting away was all he wanted. There was his insurance. No use playing a trick on the insurance company.

Minnie grew more quarrelsome, complained now that the house needed so much done to it.

"We ought to get it all paid for first, don't you think?" Edgar said. If he left Minnie the house, paid in full, she wouldn't have to get much of a job. He knew how she hated to work.

"You mean the mortgage?"

"Yes, of course."

"You talk big. Where are you going to get the money?"

"My insurance. It has a cash value."

"Yes, but what if you—"

"Oh, I'm not likely to die right away. They say folks with weak hearts live forever."

She tried to find a hole in his argument. What would he gain from it? She couldn't find one.

He canceled his insurance, got the most cash he could. There was enough to finish paying for the mortgage. And to paint the house, inside and out. And a rug for the living room. And a hundred dollars Minnie knew nothing about. Well, he ought to have something out of it.

And now there was the plan! Complete. Perfect. It would have to be. It was the only way. He explained it to Frances.

He and Frances would go to the beach. On a Saturday. Frances's part of the beach. He'd carry with him a new suit that he'd buy. A couple of changes of things. And

he'd put all of this in a locker that he'd rent for the week end. They'd spend the afternoon on the beach as usual. He'd leave the new suit there in the locker.

The next day he'd go to the beach with Minnie. Minnie's part of the beach. Put on his bathing suit. Walk out into the water. And disappear. From Minnie! Forever.

They'd look for him. Find his clothes in the bathhouse. Think he was drowned. One of the three thousand a year who disappeared.

But he wouldn't have disappeared. He'd have gone out as far as he could—not too far, on account of his heart. And then come in slowly, way up the beach. Near Frances's part. No one would notice him. A man in black trunks among thousands of men in black trunks. He'd join Frances! He'd be Mr. Wyatt, at the part of the beach where he was always Mr. Wyatt. He and Frances, without any hurry or rush, so as not to attract attention, would leave together, as they always left. He'd wear the new suit. No one would notice. His clothes were always inconspicuous.

But they wouldn't separate, as they always had. They'd go on. West, maybe. On and on. They wouldn't have much money; but they'd have enough to get someplace. To California, maybe. And he could get a job. He'd never minded working. A beach and a job. And the sun. And Frances.

It sounded too simple. Too easy.

He looked back at the house as they drove out of the garage. It looked pretty good with its new coat of yellow paint. His new house would be white, with green shutters. On a beach somewhere.

"The house looks pretty good, doesn't it?" said Minnie complacently. Then her voice changed to its usual whine. "Outside! But the inside doesn't go with it. I'd like to throw out all of those old things and get modernistic furniture."

"Would—would it go with the outside?" Edgar asked. For conversation, mostly. He didn't care.

"Of course it would. How ignorantly you talk. People with older houses than ours, fix them up modernistic. But it takes money. And with your salary—"

"We've done quite a lot this year."

"I'll never hear the end of it. You'd think you'd done it all. Your insurance is what did it. And who helped you save for that? I guess I don't even get credit."

"Of course you do, Minnie."

"And you'd better take out more insurance. As soon as the last bill gets paid for. I'd like to get a few things for the house. But you fussed about the new end tables."

"No, I didn't, Minnie."

"I could see how you felt. I've been afraid to tell you; but I've got a new coffee table coming on Monday."

Monday! Maybe he'd never see the new coffee table! He never saw the new coffee table.

He spent a couple of hours on the beach, as he had planned. He listened to Minnie. He even tried to compliment her. Not too much. Not enough to make her suspicious. Just enough so that she'd remember him pleasantly.

He stood up, shook the sand from his suit. "I guess I'll go for a swim," he said.

Minnie watched him for a while. Oh, he'd behave as long as her eye was on him! She wondered idly what he did, those days when she wasn't along. She couldn't imagine he was up to much harm, out in all this sun with these awful people.

She tried to get comfortable on the sand. She dozed a little. Then she fished in her bag until she found a soft, crumpled bar of chocolate. She nibbled at it, though it made her mouth dry. Edgar could get some coke when he got back.

How long he was! Had he forgotten all about her? She looked at her watch. It was later than she'd thought. Where was Edgar? Wasn't that just like him! But he couldn't be swimming all this time.

She tried to pick him out, in the water. She watched the bobbing figures.

She thought she saw him. Raised her arm. Beckoned. She thought the man waved to her. She beckoned again. When the man came nearer, she saw that it wasn't Edgar at all.

She waited as patiently as she ever waited, for a long time. Then she grew angry. A nice trick to play on her! He probably met someone he knew! Why didn't he bring them over to her?

Could something have happened to him? To Edgar? He wasn't the sort of man things happened to. When folks began to go home and the sun dropped, she grew frightened.

The beach attendants and the lifeguards listened to her. At first they didn't seem perturbed. Then, when Edgar didn't appear and Minnie grew hysterical, they did what they could.

Yes, there had been an undertow. Quite a bad one. A couple of people had been caught in it; but they'd been brought in. But no one had seen anyone else struggling.

"Was he a good swimmer?"

"Pretty good," Minnie said.

"Did he go far out?"

"Yes. He went way out there." Minnie pointed.

A lifeguard swam around. Others launched a boat and searched. There was a group around Minnie. A couple of policemen. Curiosity seekers. Minnie liked being the center of attention. She grew more and more hysterical.

One of the policemen looked for—and found—Edgar's

clothes in his locker. Minnie hadn't even thought of that.

"Well, he didn't get away," a policeman said. It never occurred to her he'd go away. And yet it never occurred to her he'd drown, either.

Finally she drove the car home alone.

The next day Ridge Kelly, a detective from the Missing Persons Bureau, came to talk with her. He'd just been taken off a patrolman's job and raised to plainclothes work, and he took his post seriously. He was kind-hearted, and he was keen.

He asked Minnie a lot of questions. "You don't think your husband was drowned?" he asked.

"No, I don't."

"But he went out pretty far, you say. His clothes were there. A lot of men are drowned each year."

"Then where's his body?"

"Sometimes for days—" Kelly's voice was gentle.

"Then you don't think there's any hope?"

"Unless he was picked up on the beach. Amnesia, you know. But we've made inquiries."

"He—he's gone away." Minnie's nose and eyes were red from weeping, but anger was uppermost. "He never cared anything for me. He ran away."

"He supported you, didn't he?"

"Yes, but he never made much money. If you call that supporting me."

"You have this house—paid for, you say?"

"Yes, just paid for this year. And sore at me if I bought one extra thing for it. Why, even yesterday—"

"And you've got a car?"

"Last year's. Just finished paying for that a couple of months ago. Always buys a car on time and spends a year and a half paying for it."

"But he left that."

"Sure, he couldn't get away with that!"

"His insurance?"

"He wasn't insured, I tell you. Got a cash whatever-you-call-it this summer—to finish paying for the house. That's just like him! Leaving me like this!" She was crying again.

"I'm afraid there's nothing we can do, ma'am. He couldn't have run away—in a bathing suit."

"But his—his body?"

"It may come in. It may not. If there was insurance we might question it. But as it is—"

"Then you think he's drowned? You don't think there's any doubt?"

"Look here, ma'am, I'm as skeptical as the next one. But here's a man with a weak heart and no insurance, goes out for a swim on a day when there's an undertow. And he doesn't come back. And his clothes are in his locker. You don't miss any clothes, do you?"

Minnie didn't miss any clothes. "You're not going to end the case like this?" she asked.

"Of course not. Half a dozen men are working on it. We'll let you know."

Kelly reported to her a couple of days later. They hadn't found anything. Edgar had left his office on Friday as he always left it. He'd known he didn't have to report on this particular Saturday, as Minnie had known, too. His desk was in order; but it was always in order when he left at the end of the week. No, there was no girl or woman in the office he ever paid any attention to.

"Never saw him with a woman," his boss reported.

The boss wrote Minnie a letter. Told her how much he had liked Edgar, what a good, dependable employe he had been. And enclosed a check which more than covered six months' salary. Minnie was surprised and

gratified at first; then she thought it should have been a year's salary.

Of course, even with the unexpected money, Minnie would have to get a job after a while. She hated the idea of getting up in the morning and dressing and going to town. A job with long hours. Just what Edgar had done all these years. Why, Edgar was gone. Drowned. It didn't seem possible! It was a dirty trick.

"Don't stop looking for him," she told the detective.

"I won't," Kelly promised. He studied the pictures she gave him. Informal snapshots; Edgar had never sat for a formal picture. There weren't even many of these, nor were they very clear. They had a camera; but Edgar was the one who usually took the pictures, so they were mostly of Minnie. Or their friends. Or the ocean. Or the little dog that had died.

"His hair was beginning to recede," Minnie said. "And he walked round-shouldered. I was always telling him to straighten up. And he walked with his feet too far apart. Waddled, sort of."

Kelly didn't know where to look. A man who drowns at sea.

"He had a habit of biting his fingers when he was nervous. You'd know him by that. And sometimes, when he was nervous, he had a sort of little cough, before words. Do you think you'd know him?"

Kelly said, "I'd know him, all right."

Oh, he'd know him. But there didn't seem much use in remembering. If the man had died while he was swimming. Still, his wife seemed awfully sure, in spite of everything. They get hunches, sometimes, women do. Kelly had noticed that. He'd keep it in mind, anyhow. It would be quite a triumph for him, producing a man who was supposed to be drowned. Right out of thin air.

Mr. and Mrs. Ridge Kelly drove to the Coast on their honeymoon. It was Kelly's first real holiday, the first time he'd crossed the country.

Mrs. Kelly was pretty and cute and twenty-one. And loved everyone and everything, especially her tall, good-looking husband.

"I do wish I could watch you make an arrest or something," she said.

"I couldn't very well make an arrest outside the state. If I did find anything suspicious, I'd have to get the police in another city or get a warrant."

"Even that would be exciting."

"Well, you can never tell. Let's forget all about that now, honey. We're on a honeymoon."

"Sure, let's forget all about it. But it would be fun."

"Sure, it'd be fun," said Kelly. He wouldn't mind impressing his wife and maybe making a bit of a name for himself.

They drove through Kentucky. And Tennessee. And Arkansas. Through Oklahoma. And Arizona. Not a suspicious character the whole way! They slept in hotels and motels and auto camps. They ate in lunchrooms and roadside inns. They drove early and late. They did everything tourists usually do. And nothing happened that Kelly could use to impress his bride.

In California they drove to Hollywood, and Kelly knew someone who knew someone who knew the man who was secretary to a producer at Warner Brothers. So Mr. and Mrs. Kelly drove to Burbank and went through the studio and saw the New York streets and the big sound sets and watched some actors do a scene. It was wonderful! Months later, when they saw the picture on the screen, they talked and talked about it.

They drove through little towns along the coast and wondered at their unreal beauty.

"Look! Those little white houses on the beach! Right out of a fairy-tale book!" Mrs. Kelly said.

"They sure are," said Kelly, pleased with her enthusiasm.

They stopped for ice-cream sodas at a drugstore on one of the curved streets of a little town.

A man passed, and something inside Kelly's head clicked. He liked that to happen. It made him breathe a bit faster.

The man was nothing to look at, really. He had no hat on, and his hair was a bit thin and receding. But a lot of men look like that. And he walked bent over just a little, and his feet were just a trifle apart, which made his walk a sort of waddle. He was wearing light trousers and no coat—the way most of the men in town were dressed that day.

"Hold on!" said Kelly and left Mrs. Kelly drinking her ice-cream soda.

He hurried out of the drugstore, down the curved street, after the man.

"Hey, Wilson!" he called. The man didn't look around. That's the idea he had—your suspect is supposed to look frightened, first thing.

Kelly went up to him, tapped him on the shoulder. "Isn't your name Wilson?" he asked.

"I'm afraid not. Name's Wyatt. Live up here a piece. Work at the Bevan's Open Air Market."

"Beg pardon, pal," Kelly said and was about to move on.

And Wyatt, still looking at him, began to bite a finger.

"You sure?" Kelly asked again. "Don't mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Ask as many as you like," Wyatt said politely.

Funny. Most men would have resented it, being spoken to like that by a stranger. Kelly wanted to say more right away; but he remembered he was on his honeymoon.

"I've got my wife with me," he said. "I wonder—"

"Why don't you bring her with you?" said Wyatt. "I'm going home. Got a couple of hours off. My wife loves company. Be glad to see both of you."

So there they were, jogging up the road.

"I thought Mr. Wyatt was someone I knew," Kelly had explained to Mrs. Kelly.

The house was small and white and right on the ocean.

"Couldn't be any closer or you'd drop in, eh?" Kelly said.

"That's what we like about it. We found it just the way it is. Painted it, of course."

"Been here long?"

"Oh, some time."

Mrs. Wyatt was wearing white slacks and a loose coat. She was lovely, Mrs. Kelly thought, with her hair nearly straight and just turned up a little at the ends.

"Some people I met," Wyatt said. "Thought they knew me."

"Come right in," said Mrs. Wyatt. "We sit out here most of the time."

There was something like a patio, looking toward the sea. And there were bright, painted chairs and a little table. White, mostly, or a lovely shade of blue-green. Magazines lying around. Cigarettes and fruit on the little table.

"I'll get you something to drink," Mrs. Wyatt said.

"We just had some sodas," said Kelly.

"Oh, in this climate you can drink all day."

She went into the house, moving with pleasant grace. Wyatt followed her.

"They're lovely people," said Mrs. Kelly, "whether you knew them or not." Her voice grew lower, a whisper. "See that coat she's wearing? She's going to have a baby!" She giggled at her own sophistication.

The Wyatts returned. Wyatt carried a tray of drinks. "Just fruit, this time of day," he said.

Mrs. Wyatt carried a plate of little cakes. "Lucky I baked them this morning."

"She bakes every day—early in the morning before the sun gets hot," Wyatt said proudly.

"These certainly are good," said Mrs. Kelly.

"This hits the spot," said her husband, downing his fruit drink so quickly that Wyatt hastened to refill his glass.

The waves made little white ribbons along the beach. The sky and the sea were very blue, as far out as you could see.

"We spend most of our time here," Mrs. Wyatt said. "Except when my husband's at work."

"It doesn't even seem much like work—selling in the open air."

"I guess they don't pay a lot," Kelly said.

"Oh, enough. Rent's cheap. We don't have much expense. We save a little for the doctor, things like that."

Kelly nodded and winked at Mrs. Kelly in acknowledgment of her feminine wisdom. Then he stood up.

"Nice to meet you folks," he said, "but we have to leave. It's our honeymoon, you know, and we've a lot to see." He paused, looked around. Then said very quietly: "Funny, I thought you looked like a man I was expecting to see. He was wanted for desertion, I believe. There isn't anybody else looking for him. You can't compel a man to live with his wife you know. Not everybody knows that. And to arrest a man you've got to get a warrant and have evidence."

Mrs. Kelly preened with pride at her husband's erudition. "The things he knows!" she said.

"Men are like that," said Mrs. Wyatt and put her hand on her husband's shoulder.

He put his arm around her, and they stood very close together as they told the Kellys good-bye.

"If you could come in later, for supper—" Mrs. Wyatt said,

"Thank you, but we'll be on our way. We've got a lot of territory to cover. Nice to have seen you, though."

"Very nice," Wyatt said.

And the women both nodded and smiled.

"Good-bye, then," Kelly said and added, almost bashfully, to Wyatt: "Don't worry about that other matter. All a mistake on my part. But if I was you, I'd get out of that habit of biting my fingers. That gave me the idea."

Mr. Wyatt swallowed hard as he shook Mr. Kelly's hand. "Thank you," he said. Mrs. Wyatt said, "Thank you," too. And they all laughed happily, as if someone had said something amusing.

HOTEL DOG

VERNIS was waked up by the dog scratching on the side of her bed. Her head ached. She'd been up very late.

"Go 'way!" she said. Her voice was a high whine. "Go 'way!"

The scratching stopped, and she went back to sleep. But presently, through sleep and the pain in her head, she was aware of it again.

"Go away! Lie down!"

The dog obeyed her for a while. She fell asleep and was dreaming something very pleasant about a messenger and a big box that held a surprise when the scratching started in all over again.

"Go away!" she shrieked. Leaning over, she pushed away the little warm body. She could hear him scrambling. Instead of being rebuffed, there he was, licking the back of her hand and beginning to jump with pleasure because he was noticed. She tried to go back to sleep. It was no use. She knew the dog wouldn't be quiet again. "Oh, God!" she said. "Why do I have a dog?"

She opened one eye and managed to sit on the side of the bed. The dog was beside himself with joy. He gave little squeaks of pleasure and ran toward the door.

Vernis got up, none too steadily, and shook her head, which didn't help. She felt awful. She could have slept for hours if it hadn't been for the dog. She reached out

for the telephone. "Send a boy up right away. Room 405," she said to the telephone girl.

She put on a once-elegant chiffon negligee and made an ineffectual attempt to comb her hair. It was brown and touched up none too cleverly.

She sat down on the side of the bed again. Just sat until there was a knock on the door.

"Here he is!" she said, as she opened the door. "Oh, it's you, Joe. I'm so glad. Martini thinks you're wonderful."

The dog was jumping up and down in his eagerness to get out. Vernis picked him up, put on his collar, and snapped his leash.

"Be careful with him, Joe. But I know you are. And see that he—ah—relieves himself several times."

"Yes'm," said Joe.

She was almost asleep when Joe knocked again.

"Open the door!" she called. "Let him in! I'll tip you next time, Joe." Tipping! Tipping! When you've got a dog, that's the way it is. She was always hard up, living like this, in a second-rate hotel, on alimony. Her ex was doing all right, married again and living in a big place in New Jersey. What a fool she'd been to get a divorce! Why, if she'd held on—but she hadn't held on. She sighed, loosened the dog's collar, took off her negligee, and got back into bed again. The dog was quiet now, but Vernis couldn't get back to sleep.

At noon she got up and telephoned a half a dozen people. She had a dinner date with Art Grollic for tonight, so she didn't have to bother about that. Art was a terrible bore and had awful table manners, but he'd buy her a dinner and he was someone to talk to. She managed another dinner date for the next night and a couple of luncheons. Today, Dutch treat, with Flora Morse. Flora was divorced too. Divorced women were the only ones,

it seemed, who had time for leisurely luncheon dates and, too frequently, evenings that were free.

By the time Flora called for her at half past one she was dressed and looking very well, too. By going without breakfast and giving up potatoes and starches and butter and candy, which she loved, she'd been able to keep her figure. She didn't realize, or want to, that her face, deprived of fats and proteins, was far too thin, her eyes hollow, her cheeks too lined.

"You going to take that dog?" Flora asked. "There's so few places that will let him in."

"All right. I'll leave him here."

"He'll be much better off."

• The dog had been listening. Seeing Vernis putting on her hat, he began to paw her.

"Go 'way! You'll tear my stocking!" she said. "You don't have to go out again and you know it!" She went to the closet and got a couple of dog biscuits out of a box. "Now, be a good dog," she said, more kindly. "I'll be home in a little while." She threw the biscuits on the floor. "Let's get right out," she said to Flora, "before he starts to cry."

They ate at the Coq Rouge. The luncheon was good. Then they had their fortune told by the pretty Chinese girl. She told them both wonderful things.

"Even if it doesn't come out, it's fun to hear," Vernis said. Only once did she think of Martini. She suddenly remembered that she hadn't filled his water dish, which stood in the bathroom. Oh, well, maybe there was some water left in it.

They went to see a movie at Radio City Music Hall. They didn't care much for the picture, but they liked the stage show. Vernis forgot about her dog until she returned to the hotel around five. Then, suddenly, she had to see him right away. She dashed through the hotel lobby, waited impatiently for an elevator. What if something...

The dog was at the door. When Vernis's key turned in the lock, he began to squeal with pleasure, and as she opened the door he jumped on her.

"You act as if I'd been away for a month!" she said. She went into the bathroom. Martini followed her. His water-dish was dry.

Vernis let the water in the tap get cold and filled his dish. The dog drank deeply. Vernis stood by him, waiting. Then she put his collar on and took him down for a walk. She walked one block, crossed the street, and came back on the other side. She was pleased when people seemed to admire the prancing little black poodle.

"Don't pull so," she said. "Why are you hurrying so fast? You haven't any place to go!" She waited patiently, a couple of times, at the curb. When she got back to her room she lay down and rested for a while. Then she dressed leisurely and was all ready when Art Grollic called for her.

"You're not taking that dog!" he said.

"Not unless we go to the Colony. He could stay in front there."

"We're not going to the Colony," Art Grollic said.

They went to an Italian restaurant someone had told him about. It was a typically Italian restaurant, with unbelievably bad murals and not-too-good spaghetti.

"I thought if we had steak I could save a piece for the little dog," Vernis said.

There was no steak on the table-d'hôte dinner. Vernis picked up a bit of veal, put it in a paper napkin, and tucked it in her purse. It would probably soak through the napkin and spot her bag. Oh, well! There was nothing you could do about it. If you've got a dog...

Art Grollic was even duller than Vernis had remembered him. First he talked about himself and his business and his

family. They were having trouble with one of his sisters, who wasn't quite right mentally and wandered around the house and stuck notes in odd corners. Then he didn't talk at all. There wasn't any movie he wanted to see. He didn't care about the theater.

They stopped in to see some friends of his. Five people sat in a small, badly furnished living room. The men had their coats off. They had been sitting there, drinking, for a long time. Vernis drank a couple of drinks as fast as she could. She'd had cocktails with dinner and a highball afterward, but without effect. These made her feel better.

They went on then to a third-rate night club. Art knew the proprietor and Vernis felt that he thought he wouldn't get a check. They drank steadily. Art got a check. He wasn't in too good a humor from the drinks; it was clear that he didn't like having to pay for them. Art Grollic in a bad temper was something. "He'd be bad enough," Vernis told herself, "if he were dressed in solid gold and ordering special champagne at El Morocco."

They stopped in at a bar on the way home. More drinks. Vernis knew she wasn't too steady. Oh, well, with Art Grollic she was safe enough. He was so dull that when you talked to him you felt an artery had been cut and your lifeblood was seeping away. But there were a lot of artery-cutters. That was the trouble with being divorced and not so young. The really nice men all like young girls, or have wives that they stay home with. Women of her age either got artery-cutters or they got no one at all.

Vernis straightened herself and spoke with new dignity. "Got to get home. Right away. Got a dog!" She reached over, took a pretzel, and put it into her bag. "For my dog," she said, to anyone who might be interested.

She told Art good-bye in the lobby. That was one thing in favor of artery-cutters—you could get rid of them.

"A wonderful time!" she said. Her voice was a little

thick. "Let's get together soon. Dô it all over again!"
"Surest thing you know," Art Grollic said.

Martini was waiting at the door. She put on his collar again and fastened his leader with unsteady fingers. This time she took him only a couple of feet from the hotel entrance and stood at the curb until he seemed ready to go back to the hotel.

In her room she took off her hat, her dress, her shoes. Her feet hurt. She crumbled the pretzel into a dish, opened a can of prepared dog food, and added it and the bit of limp veal. Then she put the dish next to the freshly filled water dish in the bathroom. Martini took the first mouthful before she even put it down.

She finished undressing then and sat on the side of the bed. She wanted to cry and she didn't know why she wanted to cry. She'd been out to dinner, hadn't she? Before that she'd been to lunch and to the movies with one of her best friends. And she had a dinner date tomorrow, too. She didn't like her date very well, but after all you can't be too choosy, a woman alone. There might even be times ahead when she wouldn't get dates at all. But why worry about that? There were dates now. Oh, she'd been a fool, getting a divorce, but that was over. No use worrying about that. Maybe she was better off without her ex. They never had got along so well. After all, here she was, living in a hotel, a nice alimony check the first of every month, or she'd know why! Dinner dates and shopping. And women to have luncheons with and play bridge with. Pretty much all right.

The little dog, his dinner finished, came back into the room. He ran over to Vernis and with eager paws begged her to pick him up. Her arms went around him. Tears fell on the soft black fur of his head and ears.

THE OTHER WOMAN

YES," HE SAID, and his voice was hesitant and very gentle. "I do want a divorce. I've thought it out pretty carefully. You'll be well provided for. Fanning and Rutgers will handle the details. You've known Bill Rutgers for years; he'll give you whatever you think is fair. The country place, the furniture of the apartment here in town, enough income so you'll be comfortable."

"You have thought it out!" Her voice was sharp. "There's nothing I can do about it, I guess."

"I'm—I'm afraid not, now. After all, you won't be out—a great deal. You've shown me for a long while that we have very little in common. We haven't spent a lot of time together, and what we have spent hasn't been too pleasant."

"Why, Bert!" Her voice rose higher. "How can you say that! We've been together a lot! As much as most married people. I—I thought we got along all right. I never thought we'd come to this—to a divorce! What will people say?"

"Don't let' that worry you. They probably won't say anything. Too much is happening in the world for anyone to bother about whether or not we stick together. Be a good sport about it, Nell. You won't be so badly off, you know. Go to Reno—it will be a nice holiday for you,

and you've often spoken about Reno and a divorce, after all. The usual charge—cruelty, I believe.”

She began to cry, making little sniffing noises. Soon her nose and eyes were red, and she dabbed at them with her handkerchief. “I never thought it would come to this,” she said. “I’ve given you the best years of my life!”

He couldn’t help smiling, in spite of the seriousness of the occasion. “Don’t you remember that old joke? Who made them the best years?”

She didn’t see anything funny in that, now. “But I’m middle-aged. A woman alone—”

“You have your friends. You’re always telling me about them, and you’re forever comparing me to other men.”

“Now, Bert, it’s just that—”

“We won’t go into it. That’s over. No more quarrels or bickering, ever. That’s one reason—”

“There’s another woman, I’d like to bet,” she sobbed. “Another woman, another woman.” Her voice was belligerent, yet there was something in her tone that showed she felt he would deny it.

He surprised her. “Yes, there is another woman,” he said.

She stopped crying, in sheer surprise. “There is—someone else?”

“Yes.”

“You stand there and tell me that! You—you are—”

“You asked me.”

“I know! But—well, what if I refuse to give you a divorce?”

“You won’t refuse. Things will be too difficult for you if you do—and very comfortable for you if you get it, the way I’ve planned.” There was strength in his voice.

She knew that tone. She’d get the divorce. But she wasn’t through. There were things she had to know. “She’s young, I guess,” she said. “Years younger than I am. Of

course! A chorus girl or a model. No fool like an old fool, I always say."

"No," he said, "surprisingly enough, she's only a couple of years younger than I am. It—it isn't really the age that matters."

"She's pretty, then."

"Yes," he said. "I think so. She's neat. She wears pretty little dresses that are always fresh and fit her well. And she's slender and doesn't always talk about dieting."

"That's not fair!" said Nell. "I do have to diet. It makes me dizzy to exercise. But I'm sure I don't keep talking about it."

"I'm just telling you," said Bert. "You wanted to hear."

"I do want to hear! I want to hear about the kind of woman who's pulled the wool over your eyes, making you forget your—your own home."

"That's just it—it isn't much of a home. A home's what I wanted. Not a house full of expensive furniture and a lot of parasites cluttering up the place. Why, I can't come home without finding the house full of people drinking my liquor, smoking my cigarettes, but hardly even speaking to me."

"That's it. You're angry because they don't pay any attention to you. They're interested in things like—like the theater—and art."

"Yes, that's true," said Bert. "I'm a businessman. Always was. Only I wasn't a very big one when you met me, remember?"

She remembered. "How can I forget! There were years when you didn't have anything. When we worried about the rent, even. This—this woman won't have to go through that, you see! She's—she's interested in you, I suppose, and in your business!"

"Surprisingly enough, she is," said Bert. "She not only

listens when I talk about what I've been doing during the day, but she asks intelligent questions—and remembers the answers. It's something to come home to—a woman who is interested in you and interested in what you do."

"She knows all about politics, I guess—things like that!" There was a suggestion of a sneer in Nell's voice.

"Well, I wouldn't say she's a mental giant. But she keeps up. Reads more than the fashions in the newspapers. First-page stuff and a couple of news magazines. Knows a little bit about what's going on—and surely there is enough going on."

"You make her sound awfully serious and dull, I can tell you that."

"That's just it. She isn't dull at all. She's always jolly. And she sees fun in everything. And yet she doesn't gossip or say unkind things."

"I do, I guess!"

"Well, it's one of the things we've argued enough about. I don't believe in always tearing down."

"I can just see her. A prig! I bet she doesn't even play bridge."

"How right you are. Why, she doesn't even think it's too dreadful to spend an evening at home, reading or talking or watching TV."

"Just cut out after your pattern, isn't she?" Nell was sneering now. "Any other virtues I haven't got?"

"Well, yes," he said. "She isn't extravagant, for one thing. Oh, I know I've got money; but a useless spending of so much for clothes that never get worn out—"

"There you go again! I'm extravagant, you mean."

"Why, yes, I do mean that. It can't be a surprise to you, the many times we've spoken about it. But there's no use torturing each other. We know it's over. I'm leaving, now. I'm going to my club."

"Going to her, most likely."

"Well, no," he said and hesitated, as if he wanted to say something more, but wasn't sure.

Nell had more to say. "I—I bet she's the vamp type and has taken you in good and strong."

"Maybe," he answered. "She's sweet and pretty."

"Sweet? Pretty?"

"Yes, she is. Never uses cold cream in front of me. Hair always neat. No sloppy dressing gowns."

"Maybe now—but wait until you're married to her. You'll find out then, all right."

"That's what happens sometimes," he said very slowly.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all." He turned to leave. The thing was over. There was nothing more to say.

"Look here," she said. "You can't leave like this. After—after you've told me there's another woman!" Her voice grew higher. There was a touch of hysteria in it now. "Who is the woman? I want to know."

"Don't you know?" His voice was suddenly stern. "I thought maybe you'd guessed."

"Someone we know? Some double-crossing friend of mine? Some—"

"Calm yourself, Nell," he said. "It's too late for all that. The other woman—don't you really know?—is you. *The girl you were when I married you.*"

"Oh!" she said. And again, "Oh!" And began to cry once more. "Isn't there some way? Some way?"

"I'm afraid not," he said. "I've tried to find a way for a long time. Please stop crying. And see Bill Rutgers in the morning. You'll feel better then. You haven't been that other girl in a long time. You won't miss me after you get used to the idea. You haven't missed me for a long time, and I've really been away, you know." He put

his hand on her shoulder and said, very gently: "Good-bye, Nell. -I'm sorry it had to end this way."

She was still sobbing, but very softly, as he left the room. Now that she knew who her rival was, she knew there wasn't any use trying to fight against her.